6: Moser and Tayler E.N-5 (1960-1961) 1967 SQ19 Tucano SQ19

The Cocaine Eaters 000

by

Brian Moser and Donald Tayler

Taplinger Publishing Co., Inc.
New York, N.Y.

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First published in the United States, 1967

TAPLINGER PUBLISHING CO., INC.
29 E. Tenth Street
New York, New York 10003

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Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 67-11639

Text printed in Great Britain

Colour and black and white plates printed in Denmark by Kurt Victor Hansen, Bredgade 25, Copenhagen K

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Part 2

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Tukano

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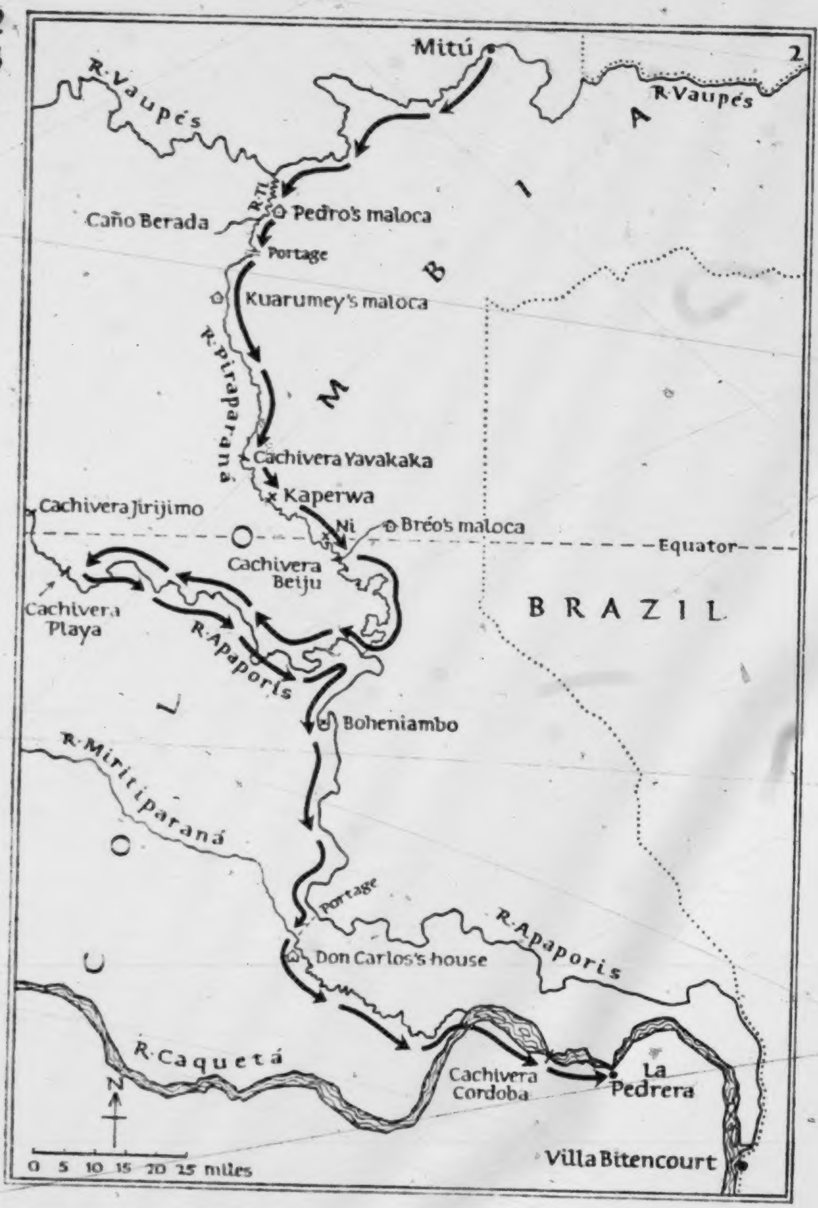
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Mitú
R. Vaupés
R. Vaupés
COLOMBIA
R.T.
Pedro's maloca
Caño Berada
Portage
Kuarumey's maloca
R. Piraparaná
Cachivera Yavakaka
Kaperwa
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BRAZIL
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Portage
R. Apaporis
Don Carlos's house
R. Caquetá
N
Cachivera Cordoba
La Pedrera
Villa Bitencourt
0 5 10 15 20 25 miles

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El Diablo

Lying only four and a half degrees north of the Equator but eight and a half thousand feet above sea level, Bogotá is a city of cool weather – some say of perpetual spring. Once the surrounding highlands had been the home of the Chibcha who like the Inca of Peru had been overwhelmed by the *conquístadores.* To the north and south the mountains form a continuous chain, to the east and west lie the rolling grasslands of the Llanos and the valley of the Río Magdalena, from where Jiménez de Quesada, the first of the Spaniards, reached the high plateau to found the present city, followed more than three hundred years later by Simon Bolívar, the Liberator, in whose army served many Scots and Irish mercenaries.

Today Bogotá seems to retain her past in a modern setting. Aloof and dignified, she is often called the Athens of Latin America. Overlooking the city from the peak of Monserrate is a chapel, on another peak a monastery and on a third a gigantic figure of Christ. Beneath, clinging to the lower slopes are the steep, cobbled streets of the old city, and stretching towards the centre is an ever-increasing conglomeration of office blocks and banks, one skyscraper towering higher than another.

By day *ruana*-clad peasants move about in their donkey carts, the shoeshine boys squat on the street corners and the shouts of lottery vendors mingle with the peals of taxi horns and gramophone records. From the fifteenth storey of an office building you can look down on to the red-tiled roofs surrounding the patios of the old Spanish houses, and mules carrying jerrycans of water through the streets and underneath the skyscrapers.

By night the long-distance lorries and buses rumble away, their roofs roped high with sacks and crates, their passengers bound for opposite ends of Colombia. Lights blaze from the stores and cafés; beer and *aguadiente* are served by sensuous girls in bright dresses; there is music and dancing; the brothels open and for a time Bogotá detaches herself from her mountain dignity. But by midnight, with the last cinemas over and the people streaming out, their handkerchiefs held tight to their faces for fear of catching colds, the quiet returns. In the city centre only the gigantic neon signs still flicker and, high above, the floodlit chapel of Monserrate shines white against an ink-black sky.

To us the invigorating atmosphere of the city was a welcome change. The

cool fresh air, the eternal rush of people, the noise of traffic, all spurred us on
122 to prepare for our next journey to Amazonia. For three weeks we were able to enjoy the luxuries of a modern city. Our bare attic was the store-room and we slept on the floor, while Joan the landlady with true North Country generosity fed us large meals of Yorkshire pudding and shepherd's pie. There were newspapers, films, exhibitions, concerts, parties and pretty girls, but our time was always short. When we returned to our sleeping bags we were faced by huge piles of film, cooking pots, tarpaulins and hammocks, all waiting to be rearranged and repacked for the next journey.

Each journey was to demand different organization but the one to the Río Piraparaná was to be the longest and hardest of all. We would be out of touch with all traces of civilization for three months. Even at this stage we were unable to predict our route. Neither the maps nor the information available were sufficient for us to make definite plans. Dr Schultes, the Harvard botanist, had originally advised us to go to the Piraparaná, though he had also warned us not to go too far down because of the extensive and dangerous rapids. A Colombian botanist told us to take the opposite route and go up the Piraparaná from its mouth. Our efforts to find the right solution met with many conflicting answers.

The only direct means of reaching this river in a remote part of Colombia some four hundred miles south-east of Bogotá was to fly. We settled on Mitú as our starting point, having decided to descend the river largely because of the advice of the Catholic Mission there. This settlement, close to Brazil on the Río Vaupés, was the Mission's base and the most accessible point to the Piraparaná. During the planning stages in September Brian had flown in on a cargo plane and discussed our plans with the Monseñor and the padres. Even then the Monseñor warned us that if we arrived any later than the end of November we might run into severe difficulties – there would be no water in the beds of the streams. It was now the beginning of December.

We had to find a plane to take not only ourselves but also an aluminium boat, two outboard motors and all our equipment. The regular fortnightly service was out of the question because the passenger plane could not carry our boat, and to charter an aircraft was beyond our means. So we asked the Colombian Air Force whether they could help. Our chances seemed hopeful since some troops had to be collected from another nearby frontier post. However, only a week before we were due to leave we had a severe setback. An unfortunate article about the expedition appeared in the Press, there were many exaggerations – we were even supposed to have a portable laboratory! – and mainly as a result of this the director of one of the scientific institutes withdrew his support, which meant that Nestor probably would not be able

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Noanamá headman with pendant silver ear-plugs.

[see p. 34-A]

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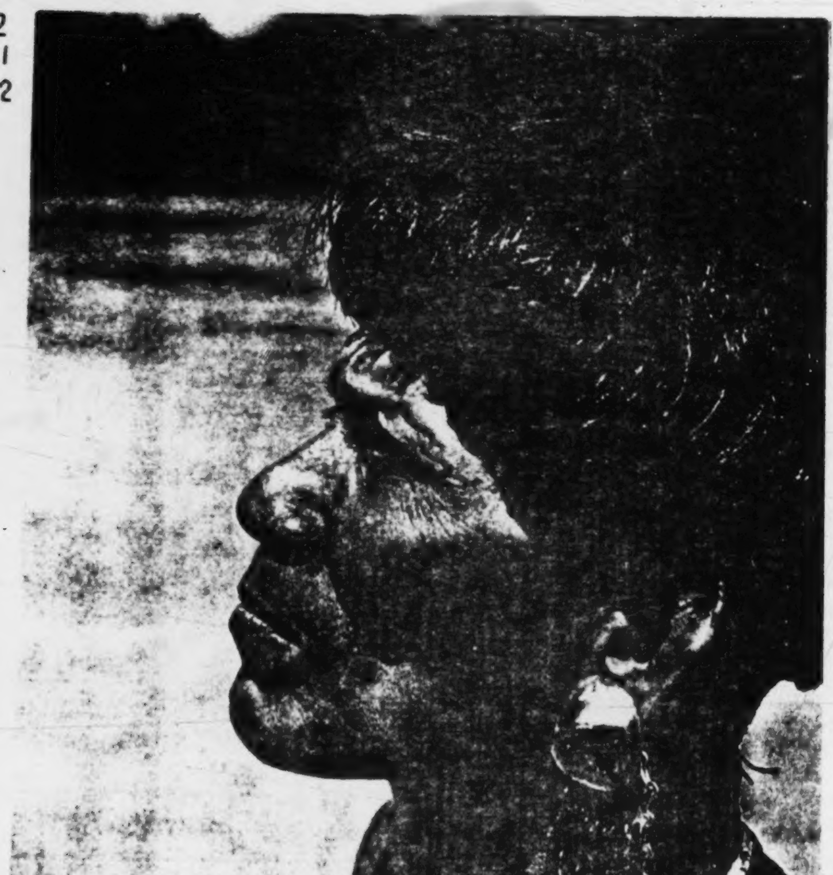
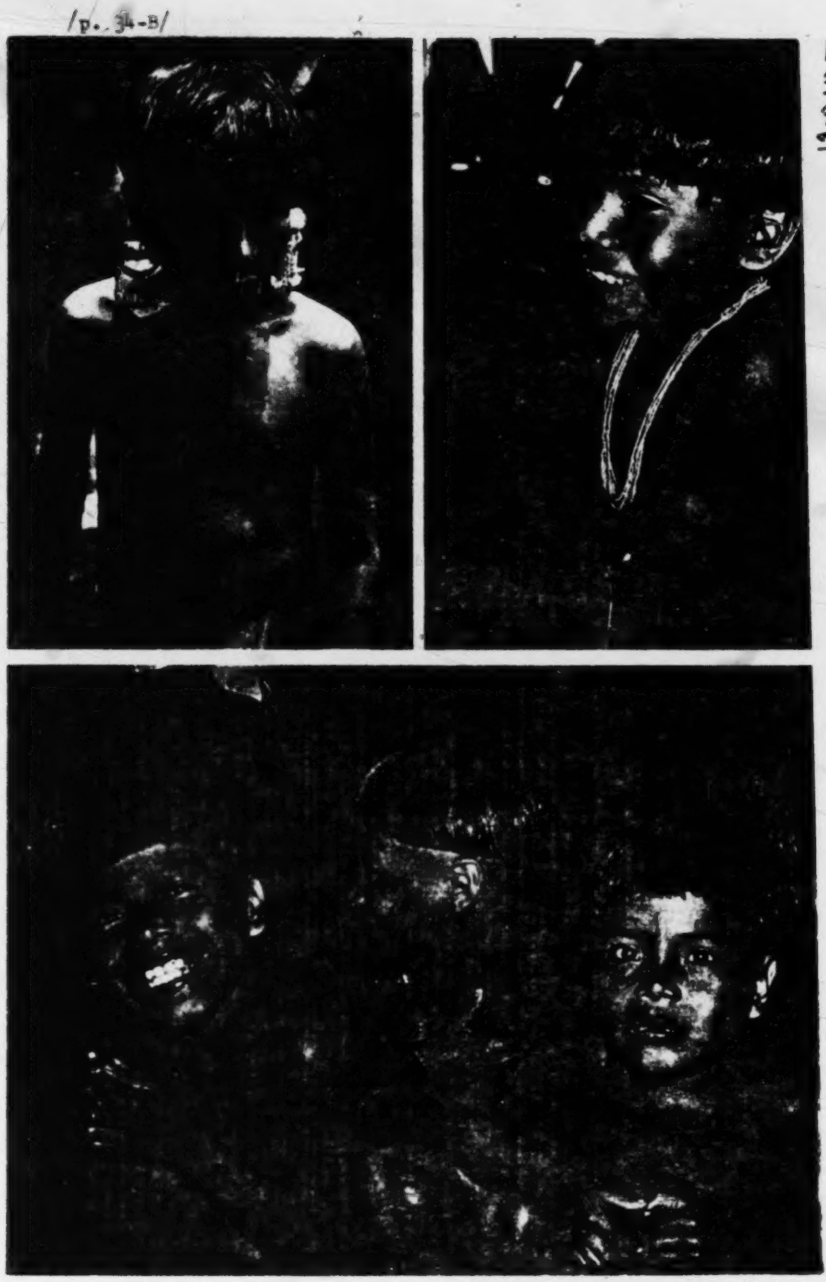


Noanamá headman with pendant silver ear-plugs.



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ABOVE LEFT: Noanamá boy, his face painted with bija. ABOVE Right: Jagua patterns a boy's body. BELOW: Children listening to our tape recorder.

to come with us. We were also afraid that the Catalina flying boat would be withdrawn as well. We had nothing more than letters of recommendation from scientific bodies in Britain and, with no official support behind us, the Colombians had every reason to doubt our validity. They could well feel that this was work they could do just as well themselves. For two days the fate of the expedition seemed in the balance. 122

Fate was on our side. The Commander of the Air Force agreed to fly the expedition to Mitú on 15 December. The only restriction was that the two hundred gallons of fuel given to us by an oil company could not travel in the same aircraft. We would have to find another way of flying our fuel to Mitú. As we walked out of the Air Ministry and across the road towards the vast Tequendama Hotel we unexpectedly came upon Horacio, strolling dejectedly along the pavement.

'I've just left the bookshop,' he said. 'I had a quarrel with the boss's daughter, and now once more I'm without a job. I think I'll go back to the Llanos, find a canoe and stay down there until the rains arrive. All I need are books, some rice and beans, my hammock and my mosquito net, and I'll be happy.'

'Heavens,' we said. 'Why don't you come with us?'

Horacio's eyes twinkled and later that evening he came to our attic and said he would join us. Educated in Europe, he and his brother had both been to Bedales and later he had graduated from a Swiss university with a degree in chemical engineering. On returning to Colombia he had found a wandering life more agreeable than research or business. Now in his mid-forties he lived and worked in Bogotá as little as possible. With his wide knowledge and complete fluency in five European languages, he had been a great asset to many expeditions which he usually accompanied as a professional photographer under the pseudonym of Robinson. But he preferred to travel alone. Though always helpful, he was nevertheless a strangely remote person. Our meeting turned out to be one of the most fortunate moves of the whole expedition, for besides his vast experience and fund of jungle knowledge Horacio turned out to be a marvellous friend.

The final three days were ones of hectic preparation. The motors had to be checked, the aluminium boat transported to the military airbase; these had been loaned to us on the understanding that we would carry out a reconnaissance geological survey for an oil company. Food supplies piled higher and higher in Joan's attic, for we had to feed not only ourselves but our Indian guides and helpers as well. Colombian money would be of no use to these people. So, on Horacio's advice, yards and yards of coloured cloth were

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ABOVE LEFT: *Noanamá boy, his face painted with* bija. ABOVE RIGHT: Jagua *patterns a boy's body.* BELOW: *Children listening to our tape recorder.* 000

[see p. 34-B]

122 bought. Pins, needles, reels of thread, mirrors, brightly-coloured combs and extra fish-hooks to supplement those Donald had already brought from England were all found in the market area. After hours of haggling we would wend our way homewards, laden with tins, paraffin lamps, rope, candles and many other items. Up to the very last moment we were packing endless supplies into plastic bags and rubber bags, inside kitbags and into tins which we had painted bright red to cheer us up in the green forest.

Early on the morning of the 15th a truck arrived; we loaded and left for the airbase, only to find the boat would not fit into the Catalina. They had been trying since six in the morning. There was nothing we could do, we had to take the flight or not go at all. So we left, without Nestor and without our boat. We had luckily sent the fuel ahead to Mitú in a cargo plane.

We slowly climbed above Bogotá and thence across the Eastern Cordillera towards the Llanos. As we landed at Villavicencio the oppressive heat seeped into the aircraft. Situated directly underneath the foothills of the Cordillera, it is the port of entrance to the Llanos and the tropical forests bordering the plains to the south. Here ranchers ride the streets, tether their horses and carouse in the beer saloons till dawn; then they return to their *fincas* deep in the plains. From here the rivers run east, to the Orinoco and then to the Atlantic.

We continued on our way southwards over undulating grasslands, then over unbroken forest. Suddenly we entered a storm and, as we bumped up and down, became lost in swirling rain. An hour later we emerged and a ridge appeared on the horizon. Beyond, the wide brown Vaupés with a straggling line of painted wooden houses broke the unending carpet of green. We landed on the white sandy strip of Mitú; once a rubber boom town, now a lonely outpost settlement and mission station, an oasis in the forest.

648 Earlier we had heard we might find it difficult to make friendly contact with the Indians of the Piraparaná. Very few white men had been able to enter the river, either from its source or its mouth, since the beginning of the century, when the most brutal atrocities had been committed by the Casa Arana[1]. This rubber company, financed by British and Peruvian interests, had extracted rubber from north-west Amazonia to export it down the Amazon through Manaos. The camp chiefs established themselves as potentates and were greatly feared. Their labour was entirely drawn from the Indians whom they treated not as human beings but as slaves. Women were raped, men who displeased their masters brutally murdered, those who failed to carry sufficient loads had their hands slashed off with machetes and were left to die. Many spent their lives in chains. So serious were the atrocities that in 1912 Sir Roger Casement brought the matter before the House of Commons. Many Indians retreated into the Amazon's remoter tributaries.

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[1] The atrocities were in the Putumayo region – not the Piraparaná – but their influence was felt throughout north-west Amazonia.

El Diablo

Today the *caucheros* still avoid the Piraparaná. Only a few years previously 648
one had entered and tried to take an Indian's wife. He was shot with poisoned
arrows and savagely cut to pieces. Two botanists had travelled some distance
up the river from its mouth, but no one had descended its entire course. At
Mitú only Padre Elorza was able to give us first-hand information. Young
and zealous, he had been the first missionary to enter the Piraparaná, one 797
month before we arrived. He had travelled half-way down the river and
then turned up a tributary to Brazil. A wooden canoe could withstand the
rough journey, he said; an aluminium one would not only be too wide for 122
the creeks of the headwaters but would get ripped on the boulders. A suitable
canoe, with a hollowed tree-trunk base and sides built up with planks, was
lying half-filled with water in the mud at the side of the Vaupés; it belonged
to the Mission but he thought the Monseñor might lend it to us. He also told
us that his Spanish-speaking guide, an Indian from the Brazilian tributary
he had ascended, was still in Mitú and he advised us to take him. He knew
the river and he spoke the Tukano dialects. So we employed José, a small
and somewhat shifty-looking man, together with his more genial brother,
Uriel. We would pay them in pesos and feed them; they would take us to the
Piraparaná and from there return to their home. From Padre Elorza we also
learnt that two Persian anthropologists had reached the first house on the river
only the year before. They had arrived earlier in the season than ourselves,
stayed two weeks with the Indians and then returned to Mitú. The headwater
streams still had had water in them. We were not to be so lucky.

That evening as we drank cold sweet lemon juice with the padres, their
lives for a moment seemed blissfully peaceful and remote. They showed us 122
their museum of countless ceremonial death masks, once worn by the
Indians of the Vaupés. It seemed a curious paradox that we were entering
territory with the help of a mission which was doing everything to displace the 797
culture we had come so far to see. We walked back to the wooden house of
the Commissioner where our host Don Alonso, wizened and immaculate,
sat listening to the radiogram beneath an old tarnished chandelier – Mitú had 122
known better days. Don Alonso insisted we drank beer and *aguadiente* and
met everyone in his town; the negro who could repair the canoe and whose
wife cooked delicious mealy *tamales*; the doctor and nurses from the hospital;
the mechanic to test the outboard motors; many *caucheros* and finally a young
Argentinian dentist who aimed to make his fortune capping people's teeth
with gold. His price was high, but he would accept crude rubber, pelts and
crocodile skins as payment before he moved on to the next outpost. The
evening ended in hilarity as we danced to scratched seventy-eights revolving
on a gramophone whose coiled trumpet betrayed its age.

Next morning before dawn, our thick heads were stirred by resounding
hymns. It was Sunday and the Mission had their loudspeakers at work to call
the town to Mass. We too went inside the crowded church. Later that day

122 the Friar Tuck Monseñor formally lent us *El Diablo*, the leaky canoe which we now had to repair. Horacio became more and more perturbed by the enormous quantity of fuel and equipment we had decided to take with us; we would be bogged down in no time, he said. Much was left behind and through fear of the rapids ahead we decided not to risk the Kudelski, the most valuable tape recorder; this after all was only the second of five journeys. We cabled Nestor to follow us with the aluminium boat as soon as he could, but to travel as light as possible; for the rivers would be even lower by the time he arrived. In anticipation we left him drums of fuel and supplies. Still we had too great a load for *El Diablo* alone and Don Alonso kindly lent us his larger canoe, *El Vencedor* (The Conqueror), with his motorman Candilo and an assistant. Time was short, we had to go now and, as Horacio aptly remarked 'muddle our way through to the Piraparaná'.

This was the most difficult of all our journeys. The past few days had been filled with worries and doubts, while our plans had had to be modified beyond recognition. Yet we had been warned to always be flexible when travelling in Amazonia, a place where 'two and two never make four'.

El Vencedor sank lower and lower into the water as we loaded, first the fifteen-gallon fuel drums, thirteen in all, then our mountain of equipment and food supplies, planned to last us for the next three months. Now we were ready to leave with the two boats lashed together fore and aft with two wooden poles. Suddenly there came a rumour that an Avianca plane would be arriving, and we decided to await the final chance of news from Nestor; perhaps the aluminium canoe was to be sent through after all. While waiting we said good-bye to the padres whose bearded faces barely concealed their obvious doubts about our future. Then we learnt that the plane had been cancelled.

The motor started and the three of us, together with four Indians, left the landing stage with a wave from Don Alonso and the villagers. They had all been more than kind to us, had in fact enabled us to start the journey when at one stage, with no boat, all had seemed lost. Now, as we travelled up the wide, 'black' Río Vaupés, we had every reason to wonder what lay ahead. Our raft-like craft moved slowly but steadily up either bank, never in midstream, for the current was very strong. We took it in turns at the outboard motor but soon realized that Candilo was by far the most capable hand, so we sat and read. Horacio, his broken glasses perched on the end of his aquiline nose, looked the ideal sage, lost in a German book on atomic physics.

The lower reaches of the Vaupés, as it runs into Brazil to join the larger Río Negro, are a series of dangerous rapids. Only recently one of the padres from

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Noanamá woman cutting sugar cane.

[see p. 38-A]

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Noanamá woman cutting sugar cane.

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Working a trapiche, a press for crushing the juice from sugar cane.

El Diablo

Mitú had met his death with two of his Indians when their canoe overturned. 122
The upper reaches of the river have a gentler gradient, passing through softer sandstones instead of the hard igneous rocks of the lower course. Nonetheless we soon had to negotiate our first rapids. To the uninitiated eye it seemed impossible to pass through, but Candilo, after one false attempt when the motor stalled, took the half-loaded *Vencedor* skilfully through the jutting boulders. Donald followed with our smaller motor powering the loaded *El Diablo*, her bows nosing into the frothing water and the waves breaking over the fuel drums. This was our first rapid; we had no idea that we would have so many more to negotiate before the end of our journey. Brian examined the rocks, chipping off pieces, looking at them through a lens and packing samples away for our geological collection. Then we lashed the canoes together as fast as possible and continued to creep along the banks, eating our lunch of dry biscuits and *farinha* – a thirst-quenching mixture of manioc flour and water, the Indian's habitual meal when travelling.

The tropical sunset is swift, with no extended twilight, and so by five-thirty each day we had to stop travelling and quickly find a break in the forested bank where we could make camp. Our boats tied and the cooking equipment ashore, we set about cutting a clearing. Horacio was a cook *par excellence*. Years of travel had taught him that the most efficient stove was to be made from a tall biscuit tin; you made your fire at the bottom and placed the pressure cooker on the top. We were eating our diet of rice and corned beef within half an hour of landing and, slinging our hammocks, were soon gazing up at the starry sky, listening to the croak of the bullfrogs.

Soon we left behind the wide Vaupés with its deserted forest banks and entered the black enclosed waters of the Río Ti. With the dry season already well advanced and with less water every day, we were forced to unlash our two canoes and continue with one following the other. The stream narrowed, the black waters shallowed and the white sandbanks crept closer on every bend. Near the mouth of the river we had arranged for two more Indians, the brothers Matias and Bernavez, to come to help us. They 114
knew the route through to the Piraparaná and they warned us that, with our heavy loads, we were going to find the journey extremely difficult – unless it rained. Their warning was fully justified, for with the lower river level the fallen tree trunks formed one long barricade to our movement upstream. In the rainy season with the high water, one could float over them, but now every trunk had to be cut. Fortunately the Indians were experts with our axes, their muscular bodies perched precariously on a water-borne log, the axe falling rhythmically against the hard wood, the water splashing up into their faces. These were civilized Indians who could speak Spanish; they had [177]
[191]

Working a trapiche, *a press for crushing the juice from sugar cane.* 000

[see p. 38-B]

114

177 originally worked wild rubber for one of the great rubber barons and they
191 had earned their clothing in exchange for their labours. Their torn trousers
were only a veneer of the civilized world, for here they seemed to come into
their own element: they talked to each other in Tukano; they became alert to
the forest they knew so well.

122 We were living in a closed world of limited horizons, on either side the
[136] thick forest, ahead the river and above a ribbon of sky. Giant emerald king-
fishers with orange heads and long black beaks darted out in front of us.
[137] Myriads of white butterflies rose off the sandbanks, settling on our bodies to
enjoy the salty sweat. On occasions we saw a delicate wader like a sandpiper
bob up and down on the sand near the water's edge. The water had now
changed colour, no longer black but a deep wine red, as it flowed over the
[134] pale sandy bed. We supposed this colour was due to the high iron content in
the rock.

Our first major halt was made at Pedro's house. He had established him-
self as a tradesman between the Indians on the upper Piraparaná and the
[439] civilized rubber gatherers of Mitú. He bought *farinha* from the Tukano in
exchange for fish-hooks, salt and cloth. His magnificent thatched house was
a foretaste of what we were to see. But the occupants with their dishevelled
clothes, the sheets of crude rubber hanging from the beams and the iron
cooking pots, seemed a strange paradox.

We unloaded all our equipment, sending Candilo and his assistant back to Mitú with *Vencedor* and the larger outboard motor. With him went one of our valuable cameras whose shutter had jammed during the first day, and a note to Nestor in Bogotá, warning him of the difficulties he would encounter and advising him again to travel as light as possible. Of the now depleted party, José and Uriel were to be our guides throughout the journey; Matias would ensure that we reached the first Indian habitation on the Piraparaná; while Bernavez went on ahead in his dugout canoe carrying two drums of our fuel. We were joined by one more man, old Miguez, who brought his own small Indian canoe. From now on we would have to make double journeys with *El Diablo* until we reached Indians who would carry our loads in their own canoes.

Next morning, while Donald and Horacio repacked much of the kit, Brian and José went ahead with a small load in *El Diablo*. The Ti narrowed and then divided; here our route towards the Piraparaná portage lay up a tiny tributary, the Caño Berada or Fish Bow Creek, as it was known to the Indians. With our arrival in the Berada, a mere stream flowing out of the undergrowth, our whole mode of travel changed. We could no longer use the motor; instead we had to push the boat upstream. We spent the rest of the day waist-deep in water, clambering over submerged timbers and occasional rocks; an Indian out in front cut a way through the fallen trees.

Christmas Day saw us cross two rock ledges where the boat had to be completely unloaded and then dragged over. That evening was a beautiful one 122 and we made camp at an old *mitasava*, the Indian traveller's staging point, where he erects a small palm-thatch shelter. We must have been on higher [137] ground, for it was dry and sandy while the forest had changed to small birch-like trees, with lichen and moss underfoot. Somehow this was an appropriate [136] place to eat our wild Christmas turkey which Miguez had shot earlier in the day and drink each other's health from the precious bottle of 'medicinal' whisky.

The next day our watery struggle continued and progress became even slower. Only half the equipment reached our camp site, this time back in low-lying forest. That evening Donald and José went ahead to the next stream junction to return at dark with the news that there was barely any water at all in the stream, and that we would be pushing the boat over dried-out sandbanks. Matias, our hardest worker, departed across country to the Piraparaná. He left at dusk; his coca pouch slung across his back to ward off the pangs of hunger. He promised to return in three days with men from the first habitation on the river; he was true to his word but it took him more than three days.

That night there was a disquieting atmosphere in the camp. Horacio was 114 even more unhappy than usual about our excessive amount of equipment. Our three remaining Indians, José, Uriel and Miguez, kept to themselves, talking through half the night. We awoke to find Miguez vanished, never to be seen again, and José and Uriel packing their own belongings on to their backs. They said they were going to join Matias and bring back more men – we knew they were about to desert us.

We made them put down their gear and then listened to their tale of woe. We were not feeding them well enough; they wanted more than just *farinha*, they needed rice as well. They were being made to carry too much, and the stream beds were so dry that it would be impossible for us to get through until the rains arrived. So we compromised, we agreed to leave behind some of the fuel if necessary and to give them the same food as ourselves; we repeated our promise to pay all the Indians who worked for us in cloth and trade goods – or even money if it was of any use to them.

During the day we pushed the boat, first down to the previous site and 122 then, fully loaded, back towards our present camp. Once Horacio lost his way when taking a short cut; he was not well and we thought it was due to a recurrence of malaria. That night he became worse, and with him unfit we decided to go ahead on a reconnaissance with José, leaving him to guard the equipment and recover, while we tried to reach the other side of the portage; if necessary we would go overland to find the first house.

Early next morning we packed our rucksacks and left with a week's supplies. Walking over high ground with willows, lichen and moss, to our great joy we reached the western entrance to the portage after only two hours. We walked through the low scrub for half an hour, along the path

122 over which we would have to drag our boat. Then on the far side we saw the headwaters of the Piraparaná – there was water, not much, but at least more than in the headwaters of the Ti. We knew then we could reach the main river, even if we should find it difficult to take all the equipment. Enthusiastically we returned to tell Horacio the good news. We found him lying in his hammock and reading, and to our surprise he told us that all the trouble stemmed from a fish bone which had lodged itself in his throat.

Our best plan was to take the boat forward, leaving all the equipment ready for Matias and his Indians. We pushed with renewed efforts but over such dry sands that we often had to stop, dam the trickle behind us, then wait for the water to rise sufficiently to see us over the next sandbank. At other times we had to dig down into the sand to make a channel through which we could push *El Diablo*. Two days later we reached the portage.

•o• Travel in Amazonia is almost entirely by water; on the smaller rivers by dug-out canoe, on the larger ones by launch or even steamer. In headwater areas it is frequently necessary to cross from one river system to another, and to do this the Indians and *caucheros* make portages or paths, along which they can carry their canoes. Portages are also used to skirt long sections of rapids where it is too dangerous to take canoes through the river. Some may be five miles long, others only a few hundred yards. The size of the boat and the number of people at hand determine the time it takes to cross. With five of us, three pulling a rope attached to *El Diablo*'s bows and two pushing from behind, it took only four hours to cover the mile over the watershed. On the flat pathway with the boat's hull sliding smoothly over rollers cut by the Indians, there was little difficulty. But when we had to heave the canoe out of the gullies it took us all the effort we could muster to bring the heavy water-logged craft – which weighed eight hundred pounds – out of the root-strewn quagmire on to the sandy track.

The choice of camp sites while travelling in such areas is a difficult one. Very often lack of time in the approaching darkness forces a rapid decision. Obviously it is best to find high ground above a rising river but this ground is often a refuge for thousands of ants and all manner of crawling insects – who naturally have the same idea in mind. It was such a camp that we hit that night and we found that all the kitbags, tins and crates were already a seething mass of black ants. Termites had completely covered a pair of boots which we had left lying on the ground, and we were besieged by sweat bees.

122 After dark there was a sudden calm. In the distance a faint hiss could be heard, gradually coming closer and closer. It was the wind racing through the forest – nearer and nearer, until it became a roar and the whole jungle was in turmoil; trees swaying, clouds of leaves flying and rotten branches crashing to the ground. In a moment torrential rain was upon us. Horacio sought safety under the plastic sheet of his mosquito net; Donald took refuge

under his battered trilby and the groundsheets, while Brian dived beneath 122
the tarpaulin and spent the night stretched over tins and kitbags.

The New Year came in with more rain. For all the discomfort it brought we could only look upon such deluges as a sign of good fortune; they were early this year, the rivers would now be higher and our descent easier. So we started on our journey downstream. *El Diablo*, lumbering along like a loaded ark, was stopped by every snag and log. She took days to cover the same distance as the slim canoes of the Indians, when they later travelled back up the river in a matter of hours to pick up the fuel drums we had had to leave behind on the portage.

One day canoes appeared gliding towards us, both loaded down with large [291]
wicker baskets of *farinha* and paddled by two men in loincloths. Strings of [301]
minute white beads were around their necks and black berry bracelets around each arm. An old man, his wizened face eyeing us suspiciously, was sitting in the bows of the first canoe.

This was our first real contact with the Indians of the Piraparaná. Their [609]
immediate reaction was not one of fear, but rather, like our own, of enquiry and interest. They said nothing until José hailed them in their own dialect.
There ensued a long, almost formal exchange of greetings which we were [576]
to hear many times when travelling through their territory. Before they left we asked them to carry a message for Nestor – in case they should meet him, for they were travelling to the Río Ti.

Much depended on our guide José. That he had been with Padre Elorza 114
was not necessarily to our advantage, for in the first place we could not be sure what effect the first contact with Catholicism had had on the Indians of the Piraparaná, nor did we know what instructions José had been given by the padres. We had to depend on him entirely both for our own safety when travelling downstream and for the information we were to get. He was not a very pleasant or easy character. From the outset he had always wanted to have his own way and if this was not granted then he became moody and unco-operative. We could never be certain what he would do next and after his attempt at desertion we could not trust him. However he worked very hard and showed remarkable common sense, and without him we would never have got through the rapids ahead of us.

His experience with white men had not only come from the Mission. Some five years previously a *cauchero* had come to his river home close to the Brazilian frontier. He had taken six boys away with him to work the wild rubber trees and one of them was José. Later he had escaped from the *cauchero*, but during those four years he had learnt how to operate an outboard motor, to handle money and had even been in an aeroplane. He had come under the Mission's wing only recently, and it may have been this combination of experiences that had complicated his character. He no longer possessed the Indian's direct simplicity.

Tukano

122 The last days before reaching the first Tukano house on the Piraparaná were not easy ones. At one point we had to cross two formidable waterfalls where all the equipment and fuel was carried overland, while we dragged the boat over the riverside rocks to avoid the midstream torrent. At the first of these the boat was lowered over a twenty-foot rock wall by means of a crevice into which we had forced timbers. *El Diablo* began to show severe signs of weakness. The ribbing above the hollowed log hull began to give and the planking above it worked loose at the joints. Large lumps of pitch came astray and we found ourselves caulking her sides with strips torn from our trousers. On many occasions we hit submerged rocks and logs, and the further we went the more we had to bale. Once a jagged rock edge pierced a large hole in the bows and water came gushing in. One thing was certain: an aluminium boat would by this time have been ripped to pieces.

Our journey downstream was a cold, wet and dreary affair. Both Donald and Horacio had ceased to wear boots because of raw blisters. Our shins had become a mass of open sores from knocks sustained underwater. But these exposed rocks gave Brian opportunities for geology. Much to everyone's dismay – except his – *El Diablo* became more and more weighed down by samples which found their way into the used biscuit tins. José always wanted to know whether there was gold, but there never was, nor indeed were there any fossils. We were attempting to make a compass traverse of our route, but our methods at this stage were hardly accurate.

We made camp one night on the driest land available, near a junction with another tributary. It was an unhealthy spot with bats swooping low beneath the trees. Later one of our guides had his toe incised by a vampire bat and woke in the morning to find his hammock soaked in blood; these bats often carried rabies. While Horacio was making breakfast, a scorpion ran up his arm. When he yelled, José, who was standing close by, flicked it dexterously into the hot ashes of the fire.

Some days later, after an unusually long stretch of paddling, we jumped
136 into the water to pull *El Diablo* over a fallen tree. A large boa constrictor unfurled itself from beneath the boat, shot between our legs and zigzagged swiftly through the water in front, its dark green body coiling and recoiling as it vanished down the river.

It is a mistake to think that the forest is alive with poisonous reptiles and fierce animals. The discomforts stem from ants, insects and many varieties of stinging flies. We rarely saw wild animals although birds were quite plentiful. In this higher part of the river, a particular small bird would always warn all other creatures of our approach with a piercing three-note whistle. Calling louder and louder it was answered by others in the vicinity. The noise was rending and the more we talked, the more it sang. The Indians called it the *Wa-pey-yer*, and we later heard this bird had driven some explorers mad.

122 For the first time in a week the sun pierced the thick canopy of leaves,

catching the shining emerald, blue and yellow wings of giant butterflies. 122 José, who had been carefully watching the passing bank, asked to borrow one of our shotguns. He soon returned with three *pava* – a type of large blackcock – which he had shot with four cartridges. Like all Indians, he was much more adept at hunting than ourselves.

The day wore on and the river widened, trees and creepers came right down to the water's edge, their leaves reflected peacefully by the calm surface. Sometimes the thick green foliage was covered in pale purple flowers, rather like lilac, whose sweet smell floated across the water as the boat moved through the beams of sunlight. It was warm and the scene had changed. We were no longer enclosed and we only once had to jump into the water to guide the loaded boat through a rapid.

Here Horacio, whose ankles had swollen to an alarming size, stumbled and fell in the rushing torrent. Perhaps this was an indication of our condition and the need to reach dry land. Sores had not healed and many had started to go septic. By contrast José and Uriel had gone from strength to strength, their bodies seeming to profit from the very hard work they had had to undergo.

Now the trees' shadows were lengthening across the river and three white egrets glided ahead of us. José's voice broke the silence: 'Only one more turn and we reach Kuarumey's *maloca*. His father was a famous chief who refused to allow any white man to enter the river – now he is dead.' As he said this we rounded the last bend.

There in front of us rising from the water's edge was a clearing of green 123 manioc with an expanse of sky behind. We paddled the boat alongside the wooden canoes moored to the bank, while in the dusk we could barely distinguish the features of the Indians as they came down the path towards us. They carried no arms and seemed to be friendly. Soon they were helping us unload *El Diablo*. We debated whether we would stay the night by the river or in the *maloca*. The Indians however were in no two minds about this, and we found ourselves stumbling up the path in the darkness, following our laden hosts, very glad to feel the good dry earth beneath our bare feet and the warmth of the fires inside the great *maloca*.

2

A Death

114 Matias arrived at the *maloca* the following day with the rest of the equipment we had left behind at the portage. Without his help we would have had to abandon it. That same night he started back on the return journey with his brother Bernavez, back to their *maloca* on the Río Ti. With them seemed to go our last contact with the outside world. Now was the time to collect our thoughts, to reorganize the equipment and to decide how we were going to carry out our work. The surroundings, the atmosphere, the Indians, everything was new. Each day, when evening arrived and we had eaten, we would sit across our hammocks and read by the light of a candle, or write up the day's events in our diaries. On Friday 6 January Brian wrote:

123 'Did not sleep very well last night, probably because I had taken a large
276 mouthful of coca just before getting into my hammock. Nearly choked, the
fine green powder making it virtually impossible to breathe; so had to run
down to the river and wash my mouth free. The Tukano must have a special
method for swallowing it.

512 The women got up very early, long before dawn, but I couldn't tell the
time because my watch was lost on the way over the portage – too bad.
They rubbed down manioc and the continuous noise made all further sleep
126 impossible. Horacio left for the river before first light to develop a film he had
taken with his old Rollei, also one of mine to see whether I'm giving the correct
exposure in these dark conditions. He prepared the hypo last night and
has to develop before the water temperature rises.

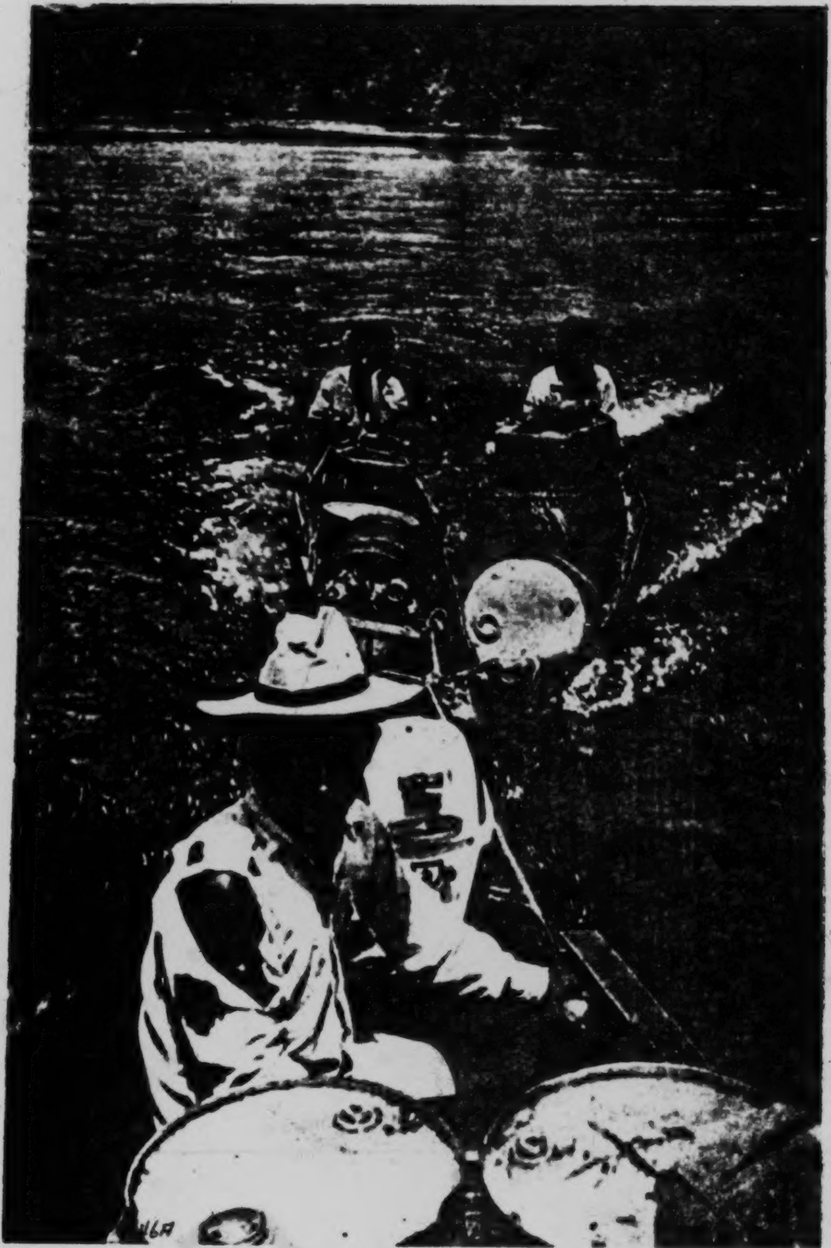
114 At dawn Kuarumey opened the door and the cold air rushed into the *maloca*. I went out to the jungle to relieve myself, armed as usual with a bottle to collect a humus sample. We do this nearly every morning – all these tiny bottles. I wonder whether the American drug company will ever discover a new Amazonian anti-biotic? Lovely pale pinks and delicate blues, the mist rising in great banks off the forest, and dew dripping from the trees. It was so peaceful and cool.

We joined Horacio for a late breakfast; all of us rather at sixes and sevens with each other as to what to do. The last days have taken a lot out of us and

000 *Our train of canoes on the Piraparaná – José in front.* [see p. 46-A]

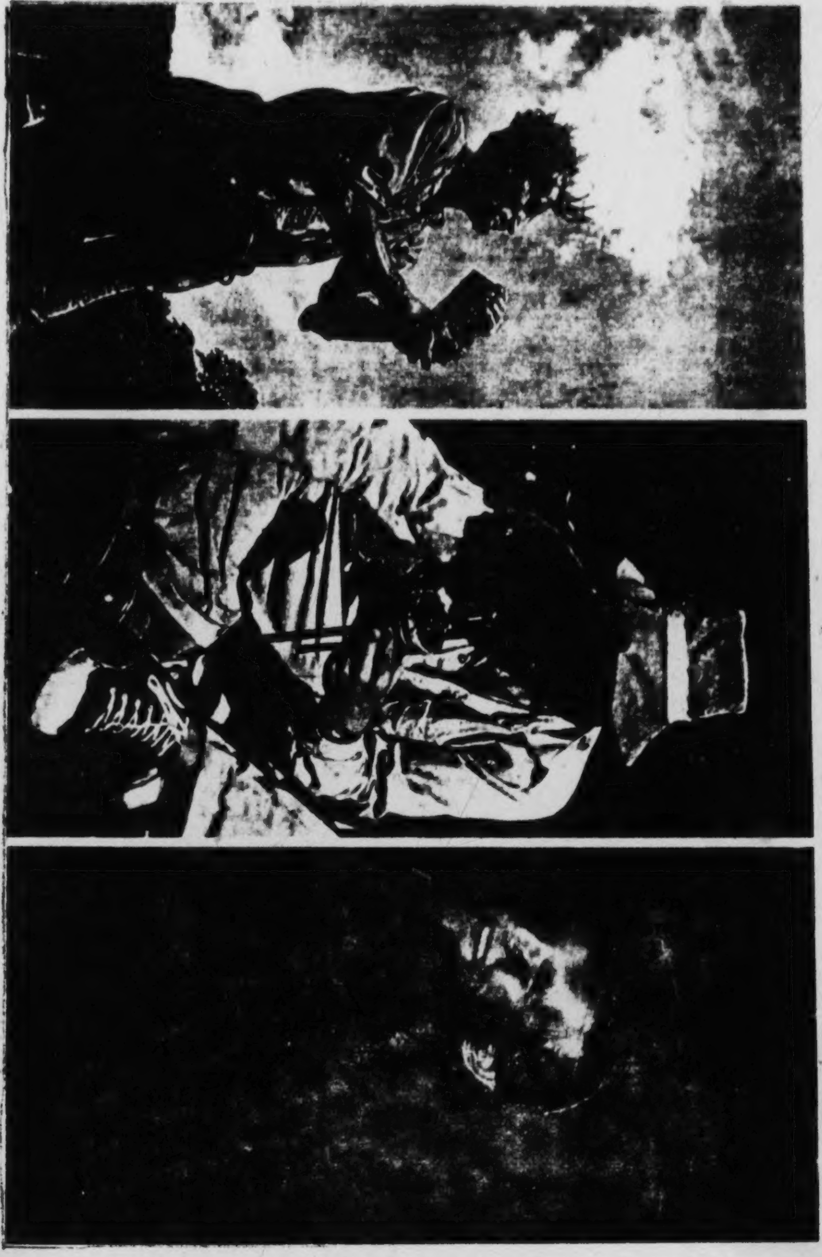
/p. 46-A/

114



Our train of canoes on the Piraparané - José in front.

/p. 46-B/



LEFT: Horacio López. CENTRE: Donald Tayler. RIGHT: Brian Moser.

at times we are very irritable. Donald, the most silent, is by far the most 114 understanding, while Horacio and I with our opposite points of view tend to get across one another.

Spread out the two tarpaulins on the sand in front of the *maloca*, then all the equipment on top of them, once more throwing everything to the air and the sun. Donald and I doctored our sores. Both he and Horacio have the beginnings of boils on their arms; this could be dangerous. If our sores go septic we really shall be in a mess – we had better take some penicillin. Donald dealt with the medical kit, Horacio checked over all the food supplies. With his blue and red pinstripe shirt, a Roman nose and scruffy growth, he looked just like an Arab street vendor squatting over his wares in the *souk*. We seem short of meat and Nescafé but otherwise all right. I took out all the cameras. Some of the lenses are in poor shape and neither the electronic flash nor my Japanese one is working. Spent ages trying to repair them and reached the conclusion that the filament on the electronic had broken – probably knocked as we came over the portage. Donald discovered a dud contact on the Jap flash and after much wastage of bulbs and various electric shocks got it to work.

The heat at midday is tremendous but a swim in the river refreshed me. José and Kuarumey had gone out with our two twelve-bores and returned 123 at noon with three *pava*. Being stationary is a blessing; we can send the Indians off hunting – they love using our guns – and so supplement our rations. Have to be careful because Nestor should soon be arriving.

p.m. I slung my hammock between two trees – the sandflies never seemed 114 to leave me alone – and wrote up my geological notes till the sun went down. Am putting all the specimens in sample bags, and it's lucky we have them, for some of the sandstones are crumbling to pieces. Horacio measured the rice into our bright-red tins – funny to think they were once green and with me in the snow and ice of Cocuy. Donald spent the whole afternoon drawing the *maloca* – beautiful, he should have been an architect. The children love [123] watching him, and one little boy – I think he's Kuarumey's son – kept tugging his long beard, then racing over to feel mine, completely intrigued by our hairy faces.

Spent the evening editing birdsong tapes with Uriel who gave me long [126] descriptions of each bird; we had seen very few of them. Surrounded by many overwhelmed listeners, and one boy started to imitate some of the songs amazingly. Ate rice and stewed bird and after silica-jelling the cameras (the plastic bags seem to puncture easily) climbed into my hammock. It's 123 now late, a woman is still rubbing manioc somewhere in the darkness: they always seem so willing to help us, but Kuarumey, no . . . he's sitting beneath 622

LEFT: *Horacio López.* **CENTRE:** *Donald Tayler.* **RIGHT:** *Brian Moser.*

[See p. 46-B]

123 the *bréo* flame taking coca with two other men. He is silent and has offered
622 little real assistance; I wonder whether he resents our presence here.'

It did seem at times as though Kuarumey resented our presence, and he later had some cause for his suspicions – certainly in his own mind – when events took an unexpected turn. He was a striking man, tall and rather gaunt, with a proud almost arrogant manner. There was no doubt as to who was the head of the *maloca*, nor that we were visitors, fortunate to have his hospitality. We saw little of him during the daytime and it was some time before we learnt he was making a canoe some distance away in the forest.

501 Though the Tukano travel through the forest on hunting expeditions, canoes are used to go further afield, to fish or to trade with other groups. They are a river people as much as a forest people, and like many Amazonian tribes they have evolved their own methods of making canoes.

[171] The Noanamá, we found, dug out and shaped their canoes from solid wood, and it was necessary for them to find very large trees to do this. Many tribes of the southern Amazon use the bark of a tree, like the North American Indian, while some groups of the Guahibo and the Maku living in areas remote from the larger rivers do not use canoes at all. The Tukano, however, shape their canoes by a process of heat-warping.

[293] A tree – a hard type of cedar – had first been felled, then a twenty-foot section was cut and barked, and allowed to lie for several weeks, before Kuarumey started to cut the wood. Each day he went to the clearing, setting up a palm frond to shade himself when the midday sun broke into the clearing, through the gap in the trees overhead.

[412] Using his *azador*, a curved hoe-like blade, and a long stick with a sharp metal end, he first shaped the outside of the log, scraping off the bark. Then he made holes along its length and began to cut out the centre. It was hard work and he would often break off to make himself a cheroot, using the rolled leaf of a palm, while his eldest son continued the work. Once he disappeared in the jungle to set a monkey trap, a ring-snare high in a tree with fruit as the bait.

[224] He worked carefully, feeling the sides of the canoe so as not to make the shell too thin. After several days it was ready, braced with two small stumps to prevent the sides from closing. Then Kuarumey and several Indians from the *maloca* dragged the hull along the forest paths to the river bank nearly a mile away.

[412] Now the canoe was ready to be warped by burning. This could be undertaken only at certain times of the year when there was no risk of rain, for water on the hot wood might split it. Before they obtained iron and steel the Indians used to cut the trees with their stone axes. They would only partly shape the hull and burn out the centre with fire. Now, with the canoe already shaped, the burning was quicker and it would be completed within a day.

A Death

The tinder-dry wood heaped underneath was soon alight and Kuarumey, helped again by his son, began to turn the hull, holding the canoe on rollers, first the right way up, then upside down and lastly on its side. The flames from the fire leapt five feet into the air all along its length and the men began to sweat as they watched. Soon they were covered in charcoal from head to foot. Every so often Kuarumey reached for his coca bag and shook some of the powder into his mouth. Gradually the sides of the trunk were forced open and wedges were placed along its length. 501

'In the Llanos they hang the canoe over the fire and there is less danger of the wood actually bursting into flames,' said Horacio. At that moment Kuarumey's wife approached us along the path carrying an earthen bowl full of *chicha*. 'And they don't let women approach during the burning for fear of the wood splitting.' [415]

All day long they worked on the smouldering canoe. About midday they bound the ends with liana to prevent it splitting and occasionally put mud on the thinner parts to prevent further burning. The work was completed before dusk. The canoe would cool gradually during the night, and in the morning the braces would be removed and replaced by flat wooden supports. Then Kuarumey would try out his new canoe in the river. It was well built and the sides were even, barely half an inch thick throughout. It should last him for several seasons, providing he did not lose it during the winter floods.

The sun shone warmly on the russet water as Kuarumey paddled the slim canoe away from the port and down the river – so light, so strong, so manageable and in shape so beautiful, yet for ourselves unthinkable – we would have capsized in a moment; only Horacio could master an Indian craft. *El Diablo* was now on the bank drying in the sun, and Horacio and José were starting to recaulk the battered shell.

The rough passage over dried-out river channels, through log-strewn stream beds, across the portage and over vicious rocks, had jarred the joints so much that, were we now to have slid her into the water, she would have sunk like a sieve. For days we had left her on the bank to absorb the heat of the morning sun, turned her and then covered her with a tarpaulin against the occasional afternoon storms, Now the old caulking was pulled away and melted down together with the pitch we had brought from Mitú. However, this was not sufficient and José exchanged some of our fish-hooks for wild beeswax and resin, and this too was melted down. 114

The fragrant smell of pitch and beeswax filled the air and as the lumps slowly dispersed in the bubbling black syrup, José began to tell of the rapids which lay ahead: 'Listen to the water,' he said, and in the distance we could hear the rumbling; the falls were three bends downstream. 'Only half a day's journey away is the fall we call Piña. In the dry season it is a long series of rapids and we need help to carry everything from the upper end, through

114 the forest to the port at the lower side. We generally take three hours along this trail, but you will take more.'

So he went on. We would need people to help us through at each major fall. Now we fully realized what an encumbrance our equipment was still going to be. But there seemed to be a *maloca* near most major rapids and with luck we could ask for help from the people living in them, though here again José was uncertain: 'Much depends on whether there are any men at home and whether they want to carry such heavy loads. There are many *cachiveras*, and Yavakaka – the Otter – one of the largest, has no one living near it.'

We counted sixteen major falls in all, but often one *cachivera* would consist of many rapid sections covering at least two or three bends in the river. José would demonstrate these by drawing with his finger in the sand. Our imaginary map of the Piraparaná became a hazardous line curling southwards. There would be at least two interruptions a day on a journey which would take the Indian in his fast canoe seven days to complete, but ourselves – we hardly dared guess.

El Diablo was due for as hard a buffeting, if not harder, than she had already had. Her hollowed tree-trunk shell was, with the exception of one hole, in perfect condition. Above, forming a freeboard, were the planks from which we had stripped the caulking. We dipped hemp – instead of our trousers – into the boiling pitch and Horacio vigorously tamped the sticky black wads into the seams and cracks. Once the outside was complete we wedged the same cracks from the inside. By early afternoon all the seams shone black, the wood was dry, and as we slid her down to the river she seemed barely half the weight we had dragged up the stream beds. *El Diablo* had a new look.

Late the same evening, after we had taken our boat and the remaining eight fuel drums below the first rapids, José came up to us as we sat talking in our hammocks. In the centre of the *maloca* the men were squatting on their stools taking coca. At the far end a woman delicately turned a cassava cake to bake its underside on the hot clay oven. José stood between our hammocks, slung in a triangle, the candlelight flickering on his face.

'After the journey to the next *maloca*, I do not want to work for you any more. My brother and I are going home to our *maloca* on the Querarí.'

This was a shock. The house was only two days downstream, and José had threatened to leave us before. We treated the matter more lightly than he perhaps had expected. He asked to borrow one of the shotguns and Brian lent him his twelve-bore. Such a move might be judged foolish, but we knew

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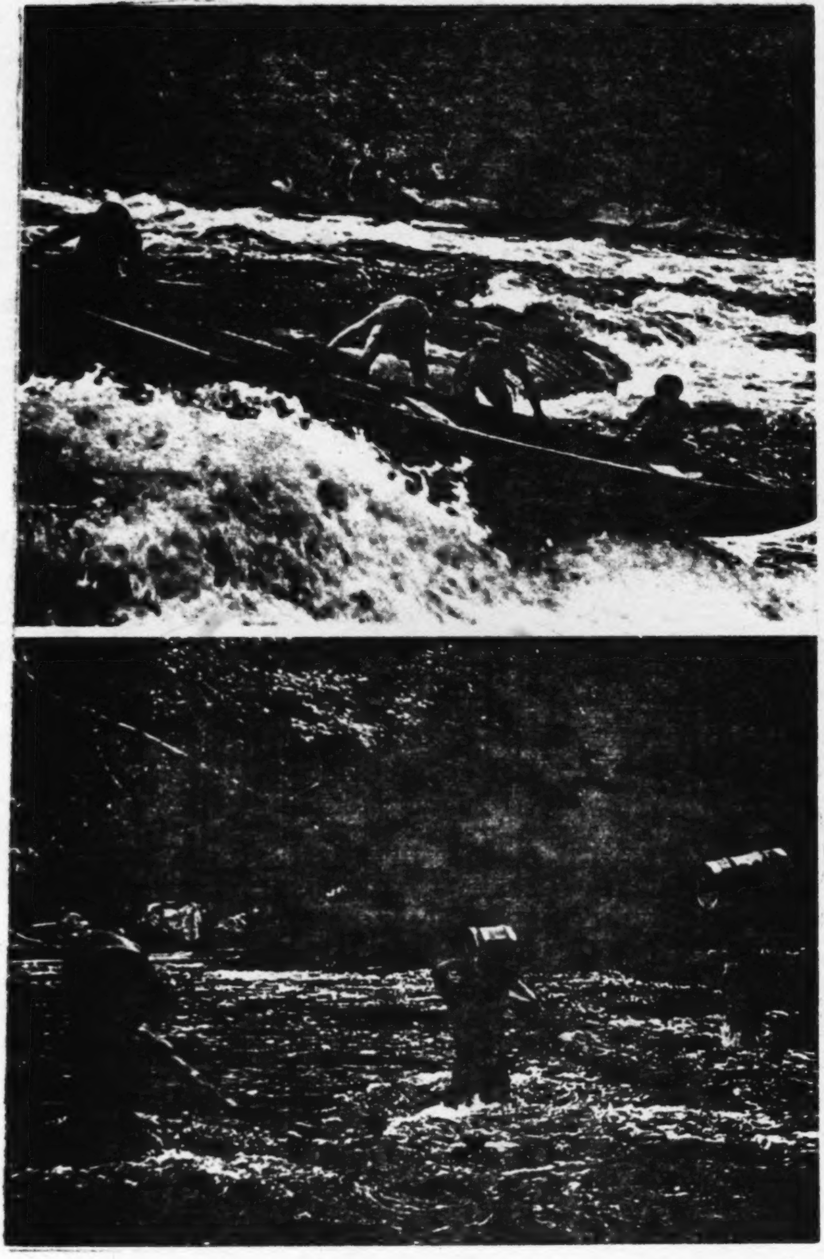
000 ABOVE: *Negotiating shallow rapids with* El Diablo *on the Piraparaná.* BELOW: *Getting the fuel drums across the river.* [see p. 50-A]



ABOVE: Negotiating shallow rapids with *El Diablo* on the Piraperaná.
BELOW: Getting the fuel drums across the river.

6: Moser & Tayler E,N-5 (1960-1961) 1967 SQ19 Tucano SQ19

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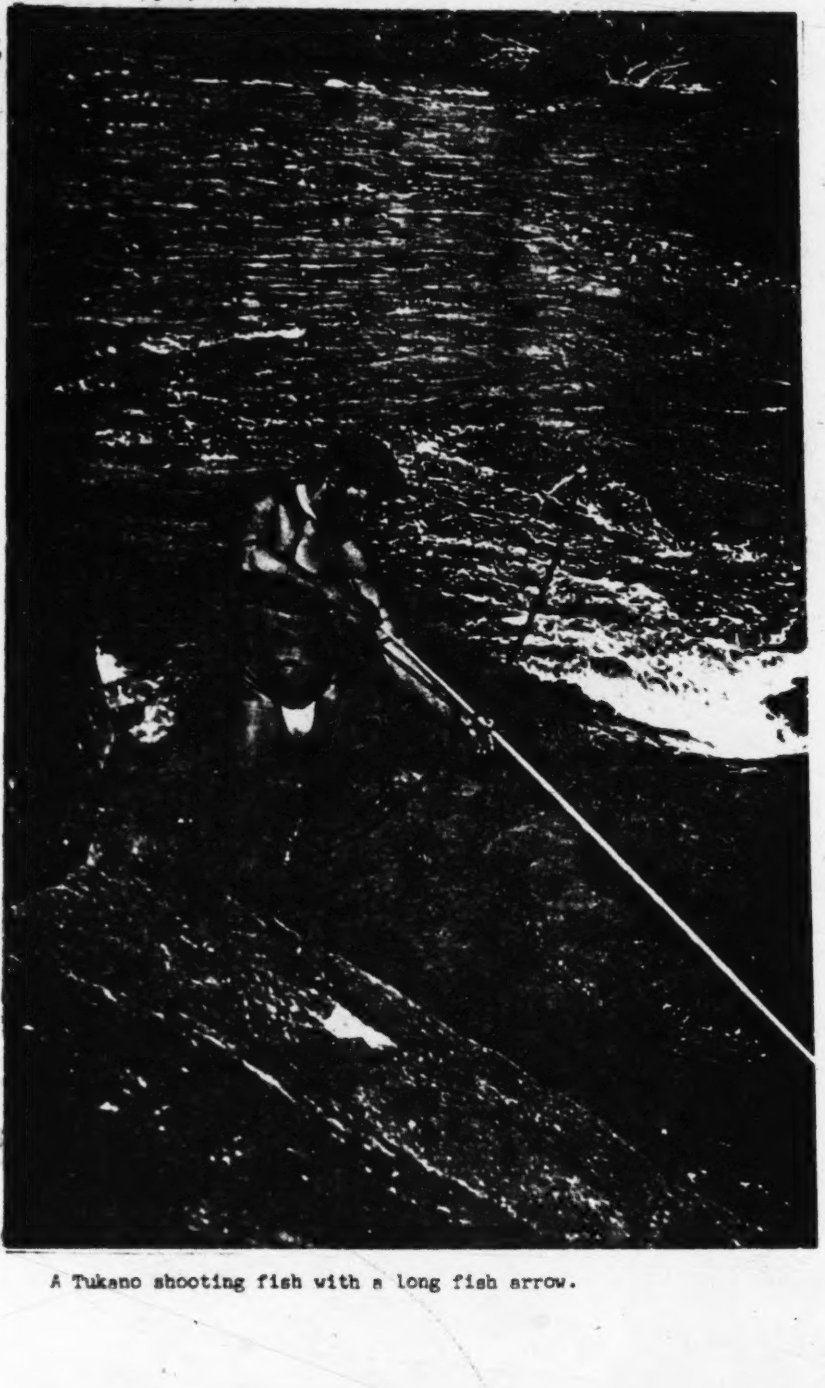

A Tukano shooting fish with a long fish arrow.

that José was the one man who could take us through to the mouth of the Piraparaná. 114

Throughout the whole journey the factor which played more on our minds than anything else was uncertainty. The way back over the dry channels was almost out of the question and the Indians would never have taken us; the way forward appeared to be a long succession of cataracts. Then there was the question of Nestor – would he ever arrive and how long should we wait? The longer we stayed the more insistent José became about leaving. He did not enjoy his role as an interpreter, he did not like asking his fellow-Indians questions and he seemed completely indifferent to the work we were trying to do. All this was understandable but it did not ease our position.

It was cold and wet when José and Uriel left early next morning to take a load of equipment ahead. Mist hung low over the forest and the trees dripped with moisture. 'This is white rain,' said Horacio. 'It is more usual in the winter months, so perhaps we are due for a wet spell and Nestor will get through after all.' We all had doubts in our minds and now, with José gone, we had no means of talking to the people in the *maloca*.

Suddenly Kuarumey's wife ran out and grabbed Brian's arm, beckoning him to follow her inside. From the far end of the dark interior, behind the palm screens, came strange sobs. The sounds rose and fell; across the bare earthen floor a slight figure bent over the embers of a dying fire. It was Watsora whose husband had been away on a hunting expedition for nearly a week. Her naked body, lit only by a dull red glow, was doubled up. She heaved and hardly seemed able to breathe. Only the day before she had carried her heavy basket of manioc from the plantation. Now her thin, drawn face, her sagging breasts, her dishevelled hair, aged her beyond belief. A young girl clutched her around the waist and moved to and fro with the heaving figure, quietly chanting to herself. Watsora's baby son ran to his mother's side and clasping her arm began to cry. 123 763

Kuarumey's wife implored us to help. She pointed to the black medicine chest. Only the previous night we had given the headman aspirin, but this illness seemed much more serious than a headache. We could not be sure what was wrong. Perhaps she had an internal haemorrhage, maybe it was consumption, or was it appendicitis? We couldn't know, none of us was a doctor. Horacio was firm: 'No, we must not give her any drugs, for if she dies, then what do you think will happen to us?' For a time we argued but eventually agreed. Horacio was right: no matter what we felt, we could not afford to be held responsible for her death, nor could we interfere.

A Tukano shooting fish with a long fish arrow. 000

[see p. 50-B]

123 763 The wails increased, the young girl's chant grew louder as she repeated the same notes over and over. The atmosphere in the *maloca* became unbearably tense and, while Horacio read outside, we went down to the river, trying to escape a situation which we could do nothing about. Our minds were not at rest and, when Horacio's drawn figure appeared walking slowly down the sandy track, we could guess what had happened.

'Watsora died five minutes ago,' he said and went back up the path. We said little and silently followed him back to the *maloca*. On the way we passed Kuarumey's old mother. Her normally jovial face was now serious. She avoided our eyes and continued to feed her toucan with beetle grubs. Inside all was silent, the wails had ceased, even the children were quiet and their innocent curiosity had turned to wariness. There was nothing we could do except wait and keep to ourselves. The boat was downstream and we had no means of talking to anyone. The tiny black sandflies converged on us in the stifling heat of the early afternoon. A woman came over to our equipment, undid a tin and took out a handful of rice, looked at the grains, smelt them and then carefully poured them back again, wiping her hands on a kitbag when she had finished.

123 Our anxiety increased. To read or write was impossible. We left the *maloca* to walk across the forest clearing. The question of giving or not giving drugs to the woman before she died had produced one dilemma. Now the question was – what next?

764 Returning later we noticed that the earth in the centre of the floor had been disturbed and fresh yellow clay lay on the surface. None of us had actually seen the corpse, but Donald had seen the young girl, who had been wailing at Watsora's side, take the dead woman's hammock down to the river and wash it. Later we learnt that the Tukano always bury their dead inside the *maloca*. The method is much like that of the Noanamá and the highland burials of the ancient Chibcha. They dig a trench and excavate a horizontal vault about three feet beneath the surface. The corpse, with the knees bound to the chest in the foetal position, is wrapped in his own hammock or in barkcloth and then inserted in the vault which is blocked with leaves, so that earth never touches the body. With the body are placed private possessions: pottery or a basket in the case of a woman; a bow and arrows, coca pouch or snuff-shell in the case of a man. They retain these possessions for the afterlife, the happy hunting grounds where they will travel in spirit.

123 No ceremony could have taken place in so short a time, and the women continued to make cassava, as though nothing had happened. Before the death they were wailing, now they were silent. The people who had once been so ready to smile, the children who normally followed at our side, were aloof and distant. Each one of us was tense and worried and it was a relief when a new face came to the entrance of the *maloca*. He seemed familiar and we recognized one of the Indians we had first met on crossing into the head-

waters of the Piraparaná. He was returning home after leaving his baskets of *farinha* on the Río Ti and offered to take some of the equipment downstream in his empty canoe. The offer we accepted. 123

'There are *jakaratinga* in a small creek near my maloca.' he said in broken Spanish, 'and I want to borrow a shotgun and a torch to go and shoot one tonight.'

We had heard that this type of baby crocodile was good to eat, and this was another chance to restore the Indians' confidence in us. With a certain reluctance Donald lent his twelve-bore. Now only Horacio's ·22 remained. We always had to rely on their help. If they looked on us as friends, they would not steal our guns. If they did not, they could kill us just as easily, whether they had our weapons or not.

That night the men squatted on their stools, around but not on the patch where the woman was buried. As they chewed coca, they mumbled at times in answer to Kuarumey. Several times one of his younger brothers left the group and came over to our hammocks to look inquisitively at our kitbags and finger them, his solemn face caught in the failing light of the torchwood. Horacio was more worried than either of us, for only a few years before he had been attacked by a group of Aucas in Ecuador and had escaped by swimming under his raft; the same tribe later killed five Amer[illegible]ngelical missionaries who, in attempting to establish friendly contact, had landed their plane near one of the Auca settlements. Horacio had always preferred to travel alone, paddling his canoe along deserted rivers and slinging his hammock close to the bank. To live under the same roof as the Indian made him feel ill at ease. Our anxiety was only increased by his recollections of a journey he had made in the Llanos the year before, on a tributary of the Orinoco: 000

'Moving downstream late one evening, I was paddling my small canoe, when I heard voices. Rounding a bend I saw a small group of Guahibos on the bank. Before I had even drawn level with them I heard the hiss of arrows. Suddenly I felt a searing pain as one passed through my left arm and pinioned it to my side.' He showed us the great scar on his arm. 'I continued on down the river using my paddle as best as I was able, lying in the bottom of the canoe with the arrows thudding into the side.' How he had to extract the arrow from his arm and continue for days before he could get help was a grim story, all the more so in our own predicament.

It was still raining the next morning. Without any warning, Kuarumey stalked out of the *maloca* leaning on his stave, looking neither to left nor right. Some moments later two men followed him down to the river, their paddles on their shoulders and coca pouches slung across their backs. They were taking Kuarumey to the shaman who lived deep in the forest below the Piña *cachivera*. For the time being, all we could do was to wait. An old man sat humming to himself in front of the palm screen where Watsora died. Here 123 [756]

123 was an opportunity to make a unique recording, but it was not the time to upset the Indians.

Donald wrote in his diary, 'José took Brian's gun with him when he left, now mine has gone too. As B. just said, "This is the sort of thing that could have happened twenty years ago – they take away your boat, then your guns, then murder you." It doesn't do to have too much imagination!'

All afternoon we waited in suspense, feeling trapped within the area of the *maloca* and the green manioc plantation surrounding it. Then, with dusk approaching, José and his brother walked up the path from the river. They carried nothing and José seemed ill at ease while Uriel remained silent. Over the evening meal we told them that we would leave early next morning and that our intention was to descend the Piraparaná, then the Apaporis, and eventually arrive at La Pedrera on the Caquetá. To return to Mitú was now out of the question. Up to now José had thought we were going to return to Mitú and he greeted the new plan with apparent enthusiasm. Still we could not be sure of his intentions. When they went back to *El Diablo* to collect the gun and their own belongings and did not return after an hour, doubts once more entered our minds. Horacio left for the river carrying his rifle and we followed, but our alarm was without foundation – we met our guides as they were coming back along the path.

That night we were able to relax a little for the first time in three days. At least our guides and the canoe had returned, though we began to think Nestor would never get through. In case he did we left detailed instructions in the *maloca*, together with a projected sketch of the Piraparaná and supplies to last him until he reached the proposed rendezvous. More important was the shaman's decision, but this we did not know, for by dawn next day we had left the *maloca* and Kuarumey had not returned.

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A manioc plantation below a Tukano maloca.

[see p. 54-A]

6: Moser & Tayler E,N-5 (1960-1961) 1967 SQ19 Tucano SQ19

/p. 54-A/

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A manioc plantation below a Tukano maloca.

/p. 54-B/

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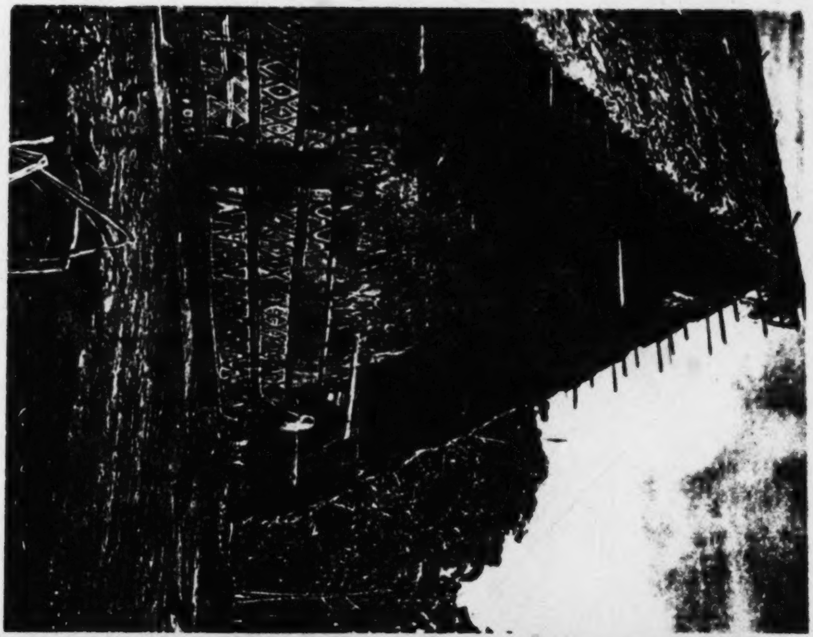

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LEFT: The front, painted with a design in charcoal and clay, and great eaves of a maloca. RIGHT: Cutting palm fronds to thatch the roof.

3

Warpaint

Below Kuarumey's the river was wider and deeper – deep enough to use our diminutive 7-h.p. Johnson outboard motor. Frequently during a day's journey we would come to rapids or a fall where everything had to be removed from the boat and carried to a point where it would be possible to reload. Then, using ropes, slithering over the rocks, pulling, pushing and heaving, we would get the empty eight-hundred-pound shell over the rapid sections. Sometimes the canoe seemed on the point of being swept away to destruction, but José and Uriel, together with the Indians, who for the small reward of beads, a piece of cloth or nylon fishing line were always ready to join us, seemed to know exactly how to manage it, though much bigger than their own light and portable craft. 114 [123]

Where the rapids were long and severe or there was a bend in the river, the Indians would sometimes have made a portage through the forest. On these occasions we would disappear for long periods, pushing and heaving *El Diablo* over the twisted roots and swampy ground through a jungle labyrinth, to reappear shouting and yelling to encourage ourselves at the lower end of the rapids, ready to load and continue on our way. During the severer overland passages the canoe might get a bad knock, and in spite of the recent overhaul it would be necessary to do more caulking. Sometimes, in despair, we doubted whether the old boat would even reach the Apaporis before she finally gave up and sank. To return the way we had come – which had been our original intention – was out of the question. Our only way out was to the Caquetá, a major tributary of the Amazon. What this journey would entail we could not imagine, for all the maps we possessed had often proved incredibly inaccurate. Of the time it would take us and the route we knew nothing. We had, however, heard that the lower reaches of the Apaporis were impossible to navigate owing to a series of great falls and rapids. This knowledge certainly gave us cause to worry during the ensuing weeks.

José by now had taken over responsibility for the motor. We took it in

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LEFT: *The front, painted with a design in charcoal and clay, and great eaves of a* maloca. RIGHT: *Cutting palm fronds to thatch the roof.* [see p.54-B] 000

114 turns to take bearings and to time distances for our very rudimentary compass traverse. Often we came to fast sections of the river, where we would stop the engine, raise it off the back of the canoe – to which it was lashed by a piece of rope in case of an accident – pick up our paddles and guide the canoe through the swirling waters. It was as well we had the Indians with us on these occasions, for we never knew what lay ahead, and the water swirled by faster and faster. The following was a daily occurrence: '*El Diablo* was filling with water rushing in over her stern. We hung desperately on to extremely slippery rocks, then suddenly got lost in the froth with the boat going safely ahead. The boys take it all in their stride and utter high-pitched yells as they miraculously guide us through the more dangerous parts with their paddles.' Horacio was in his element at such times; all his travels by canoe in the higher tributaries of the Orinoco had been done with a paddle as his only means of propulsion. An engine was anathema to him, something totally unreliable, which invariably broke down at the worst possible moments and wasted days in repairs – if repairs were possible – whereas a paddle provided unfailing if slow progress.

At this stage we not only had to travel down the river but also to return up it, as we still had too much equipment to take at once. Normally José and the Indians would travel downstream for several hours with the equipment, then return for us. It was on one such journey of José's that the outboard started misbehaving. It was too late to do anything when the engine finally stopped and refused to restart. The following morning we found to our dismay that it had seized up. We stripped it down and after completely dismantling it found that the gearbox oil had leaked away and the whole shaft had locked solid. Fortunately we had enough gearbox oil in reserve – later we learnt that bananas make an excellent substitute – and we thought all was well again until, as the gearcase was being replaced, the clutch sleeve snapped. This rendered the engine useless. So that day we continued paddling down river in a very despondent mood – the thought of paddling our way to the Caquetá was not a happy one. The best we could do was to make for the next *maloca* and if possible effect a repair.

We arrived at the *maloca* that afternoon. Not a single Indian was within sight, not even a dog. At first we assumed the house had been abandoned, but a smell of wood smoke lingered. Puzzled, we noticed the fires had only recently been left. This was the first time we had encountered such a breach of hospitality, for the Indians must have known of our approach. We assumed however, they would return at nightfall, so we set about hanging our hammocks and preparing our beans and rice.

[123] The Indians did not return that night or the next, and the deserted *maloca* seemed strange and forbidding. Horacio was certain that these were unfriendly Indians and that this was their way of showing it. We should therefore be cautious and move on as soon as possible. But the broken

engine enforced a stay. We tried wood, then Perspex to replace the broken sleeve, and it was several days before we found that a section from one of our aluminium eating plates was the answer. 114

One day, while we were waiting in the deserted *maloca*, we were suddenly surprised by shouts. Outside a fierce-looking Indian with a carved redwood club in his right hand stamped and grunted his way round the bare sandy ground in front of the *maloca*. He was followed by three younger men, each carrying a machete, all with their faces covered in red warpaint. Mario Capitan, who had been made a 'chief' by the *caucheros* wore a long white feather in his ear-plug; he seemed annoyed. Probably he had come out of curiosity or to demonstrate his authority, or he may have heard of Watsora's death. His father had had great influence over the lower Piraparaná, murdering all whites who entered. Mario, we reflected, could well do the same. Then suddenly and silently he and his small band of warriors departed to the river, to their canoes, back to their own forest home. 123

It was with some relief that we set off again from the deserted *maloca* to continue downstream. At night we would clear an area near the bank for a camp site, put up the tarpaulin for the equipment, then sling our hammocks to the nearest trees. If it started raining we would have to huddle under the tarpaulin till dawn. It was much pleasanter when a *maloca* was close by at the end of a day's journey, as there we were assured of warmth and a roof over our heads. 114

During the course of our journey we visited fifteen *malocas*; in some we only stayed overnight, in others several days. They extended a distance of about 250 river miles – from Kuarumey's to the last rapids on the Piraparaná, about 100 miles from its mouth.

Though at times we were angry with José for always hustling us on with threats of desertion if we did not continue downstream, it was for the most part only through him that we could talk to the Tukano: only those who had worked rubber knew any Spanish. It was during these visits that we became better acquainted with the Indians, though they remained remote, perhaps because they distrusted us, true 'Sons of the Forest', their personalities hidden as deep within themselves as they were deep in Amazonia.

4

The Forest Addicts

141 The Tukano are small: a man rarely exceeds five foot six and the women are
often no more than four foot ten inches. To see a cripple or deformed person
164 is unusual. They are healthy and immensely strong. A man wears no more
291 than his loincloth, today cut from a piece of trade cotton but formerly a
301 strip of beaten barkcloth. Around his neck are three or four coils of minute
white porcelain beads, which are among the most valued objects of exchange; a tight string of black berries is strung on *cumare* palm fibre above each elbow. The ears are often pierced with a short cane jutting out from the lobe; sometimes a feather is put into the cane, or a flower replaces the earplug. With their short, cropped hair and well-proportioned bodies they stand out as strong figures, beautifully adapted to the forests in which they live.

481 Their gait is jerky rather than slow and relaxed, indeed they almost run;
whether the Indian is out hunting or carrying heavy loads he always moves
in the same way. We could only look on amazed as our fifteen-gallon fuel
147 drums were carried for two- or three-hour stretches with no apparent difficulty. They only showed any signs of wilting in strong sunlight; an Indian
would rather travel by night than on an open river in the midday sun; his
home is in the cool forest or under the dark eaves of the *maloca*. His face
302 painted red with *karayuru*, a bow and a quiver of curare-tipped arrows in his
411 hand, he has little sympathy for strangers and would rather remain undis-
609 turbed. It is therefore not surprising that the Indian's face tells you little.
When he stares at you with his black eyes, it is as though you were peering into
152 the cold unknown, and there is little warmth in his expression. We very seldom noticed any demonstration of affection among the older people. Husband
593 and wife live together rather as a matter of arrangement than through love,
85 and tenderness was only shown to the younger children. The old people,
888 once unfit to go out hunting or to work in the plantation, may be neglected
in times of shortage and even left to die. They are no longer of any use to the society, so it is best they go; for theirs is a harsh world where only the fittest can survive.

576 Although the Tukano seem outwardly reserved, lacking in affection and
often proud, they are invariably very courteous. Their greetings are formal –
just as we shake hands they always exchange a lengthy stream of words. It is

as though the visitor to a *maloca* is explaining his reasons for arrival while the 576
host answers him in short phrases of affirmation. They do not look at each
other during the greeting, no matter whether they are in a *maloca*, on the
river or in the forest. We were continually impressed by their simple yet
perfect manners. Cassava and perhaps a newly-caught fish would be brought [123]
to us when we first arrived at a *maloca*, then, without our asking, we would
be shown where we could sling our hammocks.

The men have an easier life than the women. Their short, clipped speech 562
has, like their gait, a matter-of-fact sense of urgency about it, but is punc-
tuated by high trills of laughter when they joke and make fun amongst them- 522
selves. They are born with a sense of humour, and it is the old who suffer 888
at the hands of the young. In one *maloca* a little boy consistently refused to let
his grandfather take his afternoon siesta. To everyone's great amusement he
would tickle the old man with a piece of grass, pretending a fly was settling
on his body.

It would be impossible to say whether the early push of the Jesuits up the 797
River Amazon towards the end of the seventeenth century, and the more
recent incursions of the *caucheros* and the Roman Catholic missionaries on the
Vaupés and Caquetá, have had an influence on Tukano thought. Certainly
their beliefs are very complex. Moreover, the Tukano live in an area as far
from the Amazon as the Hebrides from London, while the first direct
missionary contact with the Upper Piraparaná had been made by Padre
Elorza only the month before we arrived.

Besides believing in some vague all-powerful good spirit or god, the 776
Indian believes in many lesser spirits, both good and evil, all of which have a
great influence on him and to a large extent rule his life. The good spirits can
be recognized in the pleasant things of the forest. They are represented by
fruit trees and plants – bananas, pineapples and other edible fruits, and coca
too; the various trees used in making the *malocas*; the cool and clear forest
streams. Whereas the poison in manioc, the twisted creepers and roots which
trip weary hunters, and the jagged rocks in rapids which split canoes – these
are evil spirits.

Apart from this animistic belief, the Indian believes in an immortal soul – 775
at least in some cases, for he acknowledges the existence of spirits of the dead,
usually his ancestors. The spirit of a living man wanders only when he is 774
asleep. The shaman on the contrary can divest his body of the spirit at will
and glide through the jungle in the guise of a puma. 756

Indian life is greatly influenced by this fourfold world of the spirit – the
monotheistic spirit or god, the animistic spirits, the ancestor spirits and the 776
detached living spirits, and it is the evil ones who hold the greatest sway over 775
a man's life.

Usually the men are called after birds, and the women after plants and 000

551 nowers, but when asking a Tukano his name we would be given a Spanish
one or nothing at all. Possibly the reason for this was that by saying his name
aloud an Indian might call back the spirit of an ancestor who had the same
name, or worse, by telling us he might have given us power to work evil
over him. Incidentally they would usually ask ours, which we would give
them – to their obvious amusement, possibly owing to the strange sound
which they would find almost unpronounceable.

152 An Indian will show a stoical indifference to a wound in fighting or an
752 accident while hunting. On one occasion a man was brought to us with his
hand full of gunshot. He had been carrying his old carbine through the
[123] forest by the muzzle! We spent nearly two hours cleaning the wound and
picking out the shot, while he chatted away to his brother seemingly unconcerned.
753 Yet when suffering from a less obvious ailment an Indian is often
convinced that someone has worked evil on him. Should death occur, his
relations must seek revenge on whoever is responsible. On the occasion of
[123] Watsora's death our own position was extremely unsure, particularly when
Kuarumey departed on the following morning to visit the shaman.

It seems in retrospect extraordinary that we were ever allowed to continue
756 our journey. For the shaman once consulted has to find a victim on
123 whom he can place the blame for an ailment or death – in this case both, in
the same house, the one in which we were guests. What better subject could
he have had, the visiting white man, regarded with suspicion by the Indians,
and uninvited? Barely two decades earlier the Indians of the Piraparaná
showed no compunction in killing *caucheros* who interfered in their lives.
Surely their views could not have changed so radically, in so short a time, to
make ourselves an exception to the rule.

764 Perhaps the most noticeable thing about Watsora's burial was the speed
with which she was buried and the fact that this was done within the *maloca.*
[775] This could be accounted for by the fear that the body might be whisked
away and eaten – some of these tribes were once cannibals – and then the
spirit could never escape to the afterlife. Also, once buried, there was no
indication as to where they had placed the body.

614 Like most of the Amazonian tribes the Tukano have no real central
authority or clan cohesion. The authority, such as it is, is invested in the heads
of families. These composite families seldom number more than twenty to
thirty people, usually far less. In the past clans have united to fight a common
enemy. At the turn of the century one chieftain south of the Apaporis
organized a small army of clans to fight the encroaching white *caucheros* and
to kill any Indians found collaborating with them, but this was an exceptional
case.

[756] Even the head of the clan or family has only a semblance of authority,
though there are exceptions, and often less power than the shaman. This lack
of leadership combined with a preference for isolation – which may be

partly explained by the environment in which they live – has resulted in the 614
small unconnected settlements typical of the Indians of this region.

A headman is responsible for the provision and organization of the household. 592
He arranges the building of the great *malocas* when it is necessary to 622
move. He also oversees festivals and councils. In some households his actual
power appeared to be slight, and it seemed to us that the average Tukano did
more or less exactly as he pleased.

In the event of a headman dying, a festival is normally held in his honour after the burial. A new headman is then elected, usually the eldest son of the chief, though this decision depends on the council of elders of the household.

If the headman is the secular authority, the shaman is responsible as a 756
spiritual one, in that he is always counteracting the influence of the evil
spirits. He also cures the sick and diseased and in the event of death names the [766]
person responsible, so that revenge may be exacted. Living in a world apart,
he keeps somewhat aloof from his fellow tribesmen and to enhance this
sense of separation he may wear distinguishing marks.

Tukano families are small, there are seldom more than two or three children. 163
Why more do not survive is difficult to explain, but life in the Amazonian
forest is rigorous and the Indian believes that if a child cannot stand hardship
at the moment of birth, it will not be able to stand that of later life. The normal 844
custom of washing the new-born child in a stream is sometimes fatal.
Moreover, should the child have any blemish or disfiguration – signs of evil 847
to the Indians – it is all too easy for the mother to hold the infant beneath the
water till it drowns. Should she have twins, this will also be the fate of the 845
second-born, or it will be left in the forest to die. For to have more than one
child at a time is to be like the animals of the forest – a terrible disgrace. In
some *malocas* a dearth of children was very noticeable, especially in the lower
areas of the river where the *caucheros* had greater influence.

The children assume adult responsibilities at a very early age. When we 866
were waiting in the deserted *maloca* we noticed a small thatched shelter close
to the women's entrance. It was bare and empty, and Horacio told us that 841
this was probably a menstrual hut. They were common among the tribes in 844
the Llanos and the women also retired to them during childbirth. Perhaps 171
the Tukano had the same custom, but we learnt no more.

We saw no puberty rites though we did hear of a ceremony called Jurupari[1]. 796
At certain seasons in the year the men leave for the forest to collect baskets
full of chrysalises, *mojojoy*. When the women hear the men returning to [562]
the *maloca* they run screaming to the nearest plantation. Here they remain
while the ceremony takes place, for they believe that the men have brought
Jurupari, their god, with them, and if they or their children should see him,
they will die. The men play long seven-foot flutes. One of these trumpet-like

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[1] Jurupari in fact seems to be '*lingua general*' for god – and is not peculiar to the Tukano.

796 instruments, the largest of all South American flutes, was later obtained by
[534] Nestor and given to us to bring back to England.

While the men are alone, they carry out a trial of strength to establish the
strongest members of the clan. Each man scourges the other on the back,
between the head and the waist, with whips made from lianas and monkey
[526] hide. There is no fighting, but the women become more and more afraid as
from the plantation they listen to their men's cries. With nightfall the sacred Jurupari flutes are carried away from the *maloca* and buried underwater in a secret stream bed. The women and children can return now, and they dance and drink *chicha* throughout the night. The feast is open to everyone. It is said that no outsider has ever witnessed this strange masochistic ceremony which is the nearest thing to initiation known among the Tukano.

88 As a boy grows up, he takes his place with the men. He has his own bow,
arrows and curare. He takes cocaine and can wear the full feather head-dress in
582 the tribal dances. He soon chooses a wife from a neighbouring clan, and
brings her back to live in his headman's *maloca* and share in the work of the
592 plantation. Though the headman may have two wives, monogamy is the
normal rule. Should a young man wish to be independent, he may leave the house of the headman and go off into the jungle to cut his own *chagra* and build his own house.

462 The forest offers no incentive to communal living. There is always room
for more people and other *chagras*, and independence or friction often breaks
592 up the family before economic necessity rules it. On his new land a young
Indian will cut the forest for his *chagra*, build a *maloca* and hunt when he has to. But he will do no more than that. It falls to the lot of his wife to provide the daily food: she plants the manioc, harvests and prepares it. She is responsible for the young children. She does the pottery, plaits the *cumare* fibre and makes the hammocks. She is the producer and to her falls the hardest work in their daily lives.

592 Unlike many of the Amazonian Indians who live in village communities,
361 the Tukano live isolated in their *malocas*. A *maloca* is the only centre of human
life for miles around, separated by a clearing from the surrounding forest and placed sometimes a mile or more from the river, away from the sandflies, mosquitoes and other insects that plague the banks, and from the prying eyes of enemies and strangers. The only signs of life are the moored canoes, and it may be as much as an hour's walk before the *maloca* is reached along a narrow, almost indiscernible path, which at times seems to fade away into nothing – as indeed it is meant to.

342 A *maloca* is built to vast proportions, often eighty feet from end to end and

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000 *Tukano hunting with blowpipe, bow and arrows.*

[See p. 62-A]

6: Moser & Tayler · E,N-5 (1960-1961) 1967 SQ19 Tucano SQ19

/p. 62-A/

224

Tukano hunting with blowpipe, bow and arrows.

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6: Moser & Tayler E,N-5 (1960-1961) 1967 SQ19 Tucano SQ19

/p. 62-B/

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ABOVE: Coca leaves are put into a cooking pot before baking. BELOW: Curing a hangover by inhaling green pepper.

sixty feet wide, with the ridge of its roof thirty feet above the ground. This 342
ridge is supported by six great posts, three on either side; the central space
extending down the length of the *maloca* is like the nave of a church. The
roof is thatched with palm fronds overlapping to a depth of four inches and
extending almost to ground level on either side. These fronds may have to be
brought from a great distance and vary in quality – the best lasting for years,
while others rot quickly and require frequent patching.

As the sun rises each morning over the surrounding forest it lights on the [532]
striking clay and charcoal designs which are painted along the whole width
of the front wall. Slivers of light find their way through the palm screening
and form patterns on the floor and the walls inside. The only other light
comes from the men's and women's entrances at opposite ends of the house,
entrances which are often kept shut to discourage the flying insects that are
usually at their worst during the middle of the day. From these doorways 353
bars of sunlight cross the hard earth floor, lighting the main posts of the
house. Beyond, just discernible, is the *chicha* canoe, the great vat which
quenches the thirst of the dancing guests at festivals. Near by stands a forked
pole where hang coca pouches, fruit-husk ankle-rattles and fretworked gourd
maracas. On the floor are calabashes, some with coca inside, others with
tobacco, and the wooden stools on which the men squat, passing half the
night over their stories of past deeds in tribal wars and great hunting expeditions.

Overhead the smoke-blackened thatch is hidden in the gloom. Hanging [292]
from a beam is the most treasured possession: the barkcloth-covered palm
box containing ceremonial feathers, monkey-fur belts and puma-tooth
necklaces – all the precious adornments for the tribal dances, the greatest
occasion of all in the lives of the Indians. The palm-woven screens, which [354]
divide the quarters of the women and the head of the house from those of
guests, reach from floor to thatch. Near by are the great, flat, pottery
cassava ovens. Hosts of baskets and *cumare* hammocks are strung from the
house posts around the fires, and the hard earth floor is kept spotlessly clean
by thousands of tiny scavenger ants.

Why the *malocas* should have been built on such a vast and gloomy scale 342
remains a mystery. It is possible that their very size gives the Indian a sense of 161
protection from the surrounding forest. It may also help to keep the interior
cooler. But it is most likely a sign of depopulation, the breaking up of the
clans through rubber exploitation and disease; where once a hundred or
more people lived, now there are twenty.

José once told us that his father spoke of tribal wars on the river, when 000

ABOVE: *Coca leaves are put into a cooking pot before baking.* BELOW: *Curing a hangover by inhaling green pepper.* [see p. 62-B]

721 many more people lived there. We are told by Robuchon that sixty years ago the Indians of north-west Amazonia, round the Caquetá and to the north, were extremely warlike. Tribal warfare was rife and no one trusted his 727 neighbour. *Malocas* were attacked and burnt down and prisoners taken; of these only young children were allowed to survive as slaves. The remainder were knocked to the ground with wooden clubs which the Indians still have today, their bodies hacked to pieces, their forearms used to stir the *chicha* and the armbones later made into flutes. Hands and feet were a delicacy and the sexual organs were eaten by the headman's wife to ensure brave offspring. even the bones were boiled into broth and the orgy continued until the cannibals had completed their spoil and the *chicha* had run dry.

Such a description of warfare and cannibalism would not fit the Indian who lives in the Piraparaná today, and certainly bears no resemblance to the [178] daily life we saw in their *malocas.* We found the Indian's day measured by a peaceful regularity.

512 Slowly the great house comes to life. Smouldering fires are stirred into a blaze, for the hour before sunrise – even inside the *maloca* – is always the coldest. A baby cries, a young Indian moves from his hammock to the palm-screen door and eases it up to its hook like a portcullis, then saunters leisurely out into the dawn. Others follow. The women move at the far end of the *maloca,* still only vague shapes in the gathering light as they prepare cassava, pick up the water pots and go down to the river to bathe.

[264] The men returning from the river squat on their haunches on the low stools in the centre of the *maloca,* and without any ceremony consume their [262] breakfast of cassava bread, manioc juice and probably some leftovers from the previous night – boiled fish or a piece of bush pig. The women, who have eaten separately with the children, collect their large manioc baskets and leave [482] for the *chagra,* the forest clearing where they grow their crops. The baskets are slung from a strip of sapling bark across the forehead; they hold their babies on their hips, walking rapidly, almost awkwardly – the Indian [855] woman's gait is not a graceful one. Children run along beside them, some affectionately holding the hands of their mothers, others playing. A few of [857] the elder children return to the river to fish, and some of the men go off in [226] pairs to hunt and fish, while others move off to collect coca leaves from their *chagras.*

The Piraparaná has always been an area of coca cultivation and today the 249 river and its tributaries are one of the few remaining strongholds of the drug in north-west Amazonia. Carrying no more than their small coca pouches and the basket for the leaves, five or six men, led by the headman, go down to the stream, perhaps taking a drink and washing themselves before they climb up the far bank. They move along a path through the thick vegetation of an old *chagra* fallen into disuse. Although an occasional banana or *pupuña* palm

survives, the cultivated plants have been strangled by weeds and secondary 249
growth.

The *cacique*, the *maloca*'s pet bird, accompanies the Indians, flying from [136]
bush to bush and cawing raucously as she glides low over their heads, her
olive-green breast almost brushing their hair. She perches on a charred tree-stump, looks at them as they leave the old *chagra* and enter the forest, gives a loud 'caw' and flies back to the *maloca* to see what edible scraps can be found.

In the early morning the tall forest is dank and cool, a place of silence broken only by the occasional chatter of the Indians as they move rapidly along, their sure footsteps delicately gliding over the mass of roots which forms a base to the pathway. Few birds and no animals are about; the sun's rays piercing through the thick leaf vault give life to what might be a dead world. Suddenly they come to a wide expanse of cleared land. There is a chaotic mass of fallen trees, black from recent fires, surrounded by the forest wall. It is as if a great explosion had occurred leaving behind only the charred remains.

Every year or two, when the dry season comes in late November or 241
December, the men cut down an area of forest, and about two months later,
just before the rains return, they burn the fallen timber to make a new 462
chagra. With each new *chagra*, the men, who do all the clearing and burning, move further afield, so that eventually, after some five years or more, the *maloca* too will be moved to be near the plantation.

This system of shifting agriculture, the men as it were preparing the 241
ground for the women to work on, is carried on incessantly. Partly owing to 221
soil exhaustion, partly because of weed strangulation, the areas of cultivation must be constantly changed, and so the moving Indian population covers wide areas of otherwise untouched Amazonian forest.

It is now January; the smell of the fire still clings to this battlefield of black 241
charcoal. Soon, with the arrival of the rains in March, the women will plant 462
out the manioc cuttings and by late October the first crop will be harvested; so for two years they may expect to get reasonable manioc yields from their *chagra*, after which they must move again.

The men run over the fallen tree-trunks and from the new *chagra* they
move into an area partly overgrown by weeds and secondary growth. Here, 249
placed almost mathematically across the *chagra*, in contrast to the haphazard
cultivation of other plants, are the avenues of coca shrubs. 462

Perhaps the ritual associated with the taking of cocaine during festivals and tribal ceremonies, apart from its daily use, explains the attention given not only to its later preparation but also to the planting and picking of the leaves. The common coca shrub, always tended by the men, stands about five feet high when fully grown and may last five or more years. It is the most important of the stimulants taken by the Tukano, some of whom are heroic addicts taking as much as two ounces a day. Their life is partly geared to their addiction, and their daily practice is to come to the *chagra* and

249 462 spend the greater part of the morning collecting the leaves which they prepare during the afternoon and evening. It is a serious task and one which each man undertakes with a strange air of concentration. Each coca plant is selectively stripped leaf by leaf before the next one is tackled. The headman carries the basket with him and gradually it fills with handfuls of pale sage-green leaves. The younger men collect the leaves almost reverently in their right hands before emptying them into the basket, their faces serious, their crouched bodies shining in the strong morning sun, their short, clipped speech broken occasionally by a high-pitched laugh.

512 244 462 85 In the distance small ribbons of smoke rise in a misty cloud. The women are just visible, their squat figures crouching among the manioc plants. They can be heard laughing; occasionally a baby cries and the children romp and play among the bright-green manioc plants whose tall spindly branches stretch skywards some six feet, terminating in clusters of long, thin, starlike leaves. With their babies straddled across their backs the women spend the morning cutting out the long potato-like roots from the sandy soil and putting the waste foliage into piles to be burnt. It is hot with the sun streaming down, the fires crackling and the smoke enshrouding the working bodies. There is little time for rest, though a woman will stop to swing her child around and let it suckle her breast; a mother may give a fat yellow beetle grub to her child to eat, having detached the head – a great delicacy, tasting like butter. Soon large baskets are filled with roughly peeled and half-cleaned roots.

512 The sun is high overhead and the men leave for the *maloca* with their basket
[482] full of coca leaves; on top they place large dried leaves from the *yarumo*
(Cecropia) trees which grow like weeds in the *chagra*. The women too load
their heavy baskets on to their backs, the headbands taking the greater part
[222] of the fifty-pound weight. The whole group hurries through the forest in
silence, passing the old *chagra* where the headman's wife leaves the other
women to collect pineapples, then down to the stream beneath the *maloca*.
At this point comes one of the noisiest and most amusing incidents in their
[515] daily life. Not only the manioc roots are washed in the water but the babies
[85] too; the mothers vigorously shake their large baskets of roots, then stop
to splash water over the backs of the children. For a short time there is
cacophony, with screaming babies, splashing water, continuous chatter and
laughter, and even barking dogs. But soon the stream is left to myriads of
white and brimstone-yellow butterflies which circle everlastingly over the
sandbanks, and the women, refreshed, their long black hair glistening in
the sun, return up the path to the *maloca*.

Tobacco plants are nearly always grown in a little patch directly in front

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A graceful Tukano canoe.

[see p.66-A]

/p. 66-A/

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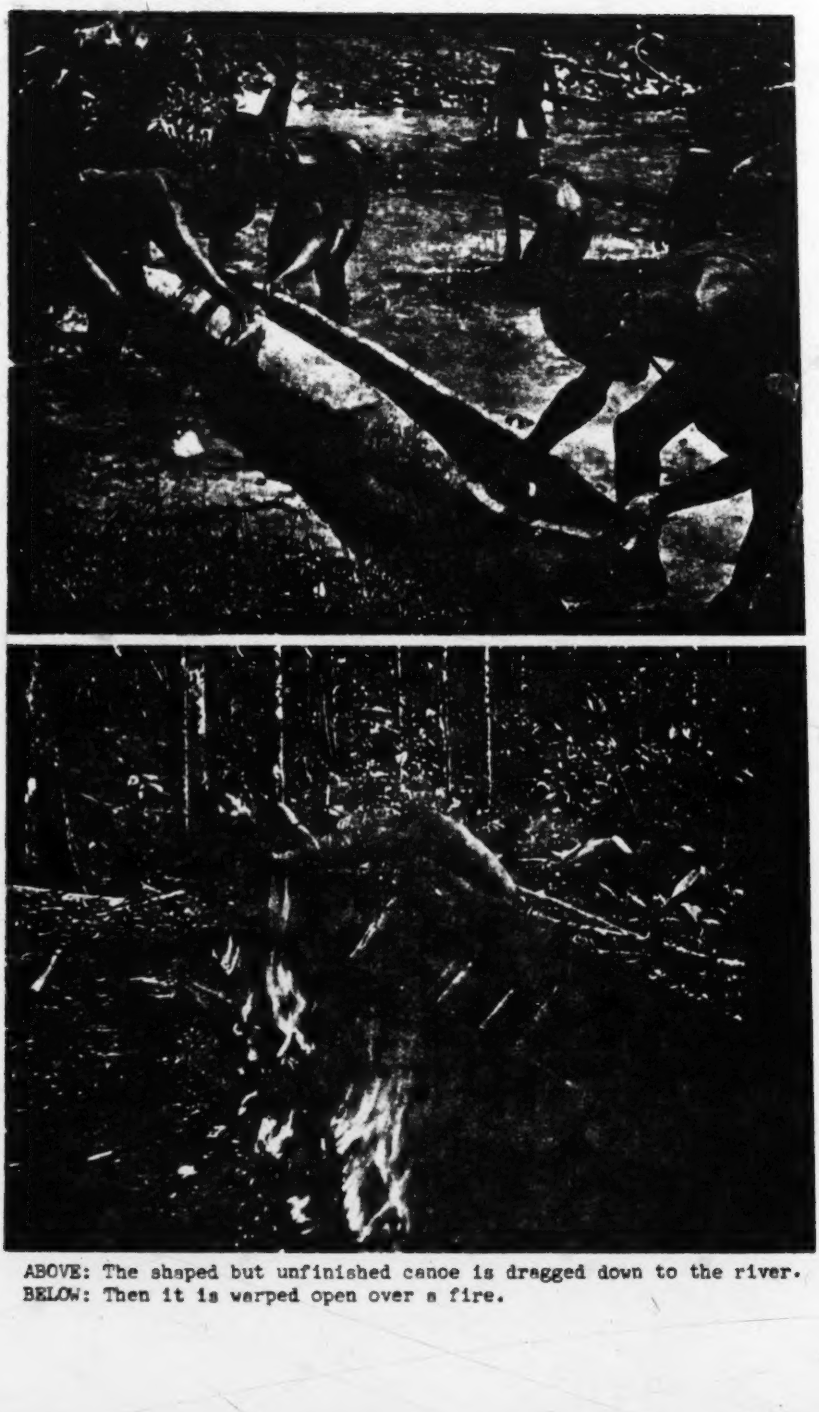
A graceful Tukano canoe.



ABOVE: The shaped but unfinished canoe is dragged down to the river.
BELOW: Then it is warped open over a fire.

of the men's entrance. Boys carefully pick the tobacco leaves one by one and 249
lay them out on cane matting to dry. An Indian sits in the shade of the
maloca's overhanging eaves and starts to make string from strands of tough
cumare. His graceful movements as he rolls the fibre with the palm of the 285
hand on his shining thigh, the string looped around his right big toe, are like
those used in the making of Venetian glass. An older man sits near by, deeply
engrossed in the construction of a large, shallow cassava basket, a maze of
cane strips almost hiding his wizened face.

The women file through their entrance, their great loads of manioc white 512
and clean after their river washing. They pause for a moment or two and eat 252
some cassava or the pineapples and wild fruit which they have just brought
back, but soon they are working again, pulverizing the manioc on the shield-shaped wooden grating boards which have minute flints or tough palm spines set into their baked-clay surface. They work as a team, some grating, others washing the manioc in vast basket-sieves slung between wooden tripods, while yet others extract the poisonous prussic acid by placing the grated manioc flour in a snake-like *matapí*, a long squeezer of plaited cane. With the upper end looped over a pole, a woman stretches its mesh by sitting on a second pole placed in the lower loop. The *matapí* contracts and the poisonous juice runs out.

When the flour from the *matapí* is ready it is placed on the large flat ovens to make rough cassava pancakes, the Amazonian daily bread, which they eat at every meal together with fish and meat brought back from the forest. The starch from the washed manioc is also baked to make wafer-thin toasted biscuits to add to the *chicha*. Some of the flour is spread thinly on another oven to make the nutty grounds of *farinha*, and the liquid from the washing and squeezing is boiled to neutralize the poison, then poured into the long canoe-trough to make *chicha*.

The noise of grating and the creaking of the tripods lasts all afternoon. A 512
girl feeds her pet parrot some insects, then, taking a strand of *cumare* and
winding it around her toe, she starts plaiting string for a hammock to re- [283]
place her old one. Squatting on the ground, an old woman kneads clay and [323]
wood ash. She rolls the clay mixture into coils on a flat board and between the
palms of her hands. Then she places them coil upon coil about a clay base,
smooths the clay with a pebble and leaves the completed pot in the shade of
the *maloca*. Later it will be put on a fire and surrounded with wood bark and
ash to bake. Occasionally we saw an iron pot, which at some time in the past 415
must have been traded up the rivers from the Caquetá or the Vaupés. These
were sufficiently few to be highly treasured and hadn't affected their own

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ABOVE: *The shaped but unfinished canoe is dragged down to the river.* BELOW: 000
Then it is warped open over a fire. [see p. 66-B]

415 pottery making, a craft which has been all but forgotten among many of the Indians of Colombia.

512 276 Throughout the afternoon the women continue with their tasks while the men prepare their tobacco and smoke it wrapped in long cylinders of banana leaf, or take snuff, lying in their hammocks or crouching on small wooden stools. The snuff, kept in gourds or large snail shells, is made in most cases from ground tobacco; it is first placed in the palm of the hand, then a small quantity is poured into a hollow V-shaped deer bone, and is injected into the nostrils by inserting one end of the V in the nose and the other in the mouth and blowing.

276 During the afternoon an Indian burns the *yarumo* leaves from the coca basket in the centre of the *maloca*, the ash being carefully raked into a neat pile on the earthen floor. Earlier the coca leaves from the basket had been baked in a large earthenware pot over a hot fire, all the while being stirred with a hooped stick. The toasted leaves were then powdered inside a short wooden cylinder. They are further refined by being put into a barkcloth bag wrapped round a heavy stick, and beaten inside a large cylinder. The *yarumo* ash is added to the finely ground powder – this ash takes away the bitterness, and perhaps also the worst effects of the drug – and once again the mixed coca and ash is beaten in the long cylinder to the consistency of dust. Often this involved procedure goes on far into the night, and we became quite accustomed to go to sleep with the monotonous thudding noise still reverberating around the *maloca*. With the final process completed the powder is emptied into a half-gourd or into small barkcloth pouches, ready for the next journey or hunting trip, during which an Indian may live solely on the drug, going without sleep, food and drink for days.

The inscrutable nature of the Tukano may in part be due to his addiction to cocaine which deadens his senses and affects the eyes so that the pupils often appear dilated. This may also account for a lack of individuality among many of the men who often appear listless and resigned.

354 At dusk the hunters return and sometimes a monkey or a wild turkey helps out with the evening meal of cassava. The only light in the *maloca* after dark comes from the fires, but on special occasions, such as a festival, the head of the house places a chunk of beeswax taken from a wild bees' nest in the forest on a large post in the centre of the *maloca*, lighting it with a firebrand. But the flickering light barely penetrates the gloom. At other times a strip of slow-burning resinous wood is put in a fork of the same post. It is this wood – a type of cedar – which the Indians use to travel with at night, allowing it to smoulder and blowing it into flame when needed. 512 As night comes the doors are secured and, except for the sporadic mumblings of a few old Indians squatting around the fires, all is silent.

224 The Tukano is a hunter. From his early childhood he develops the ability

to track wild animals in the forest and the sense of location and direction 224
which enables him to do this. The deprivations of the jungle, its innate
hostility, its snakes, wild animals, poisonous plants and insects, its daytime
silence and oppressiveness are nothing to the fear of being lost. To be lost in [484]
the forest is slow, inevitable death. This is a fear which is common to the traveller, the explorer and the *cauchero*, but to the Indian does not exist. He may be forty miles from his *maloca*, yet he will know his way back without faltering, as the Cockney would know his way across London in the black-out, forty miles over half-tracks or no tracks at all, across deep ravines, balanced precariously on slippery logs. He will find his way, perhaps by a glimpse of the sun, the movement of birds overhead, or the track of a tapir. Between dawn and dusk, he has only his bag of cocaine to sustain his quick jogging walk.

During the time we passed in their *malocas* the Indians would often disappear in groups for hunting expeditions. Sometimes they would go at night
and ask to borrow our torches to dazzle their prey. They carry hard *macana*- [278]
wood bows and sheaths of arrows tipped with curare, a black strychnine poison, or a long ten-foot blowpipe. Also beautifully-woven palm cases filled with poisoned darts secured in kapok, as though stuffed into a pincushion. These are slung across the back and carried upside down with the beeswaxed end uppermost, so as to prevent the rain washing off the curare and to enable the hunter to extract the dart quickly.

With the hunters go their dogs, thin wiry beasts like whippets, usually [231]
pale buff or fawn in colour and well cared for by their masters. Their lives are short, and more often than not they go totally blind within five years; for the tiny red *majiñal* fire-ants drop on their eyes as they run through the undergrowth and inject formic acid. There is seldom game near the *maloca*, but further afield, beyond the *chagras* in the forest proper there would usually be waterside rodents and *agouti*, small rabbit-like forest dwellers. There were peccary as well, the black jungle pig which the Indian fears because, if wounded, it sometimes cries for its companions who turn on the
aggressor with their small sharp tusks and inflict terrible gashes. These [231]
small pigs are strangely affectionate and are sometimes adopted by Indians as pets.

Their bows, five feet long and strung with *cumare*, will launch an arrow two hundred feet, but to be certain of a target the Indian will approach to
within twenty or thirty yards. The arrows, without feathers and unnotched,
are made of cane, with a hard *macana*-wood point dipped in lethal curare. [278]
Some tribes carry a pot of this poison round their necks; when about to shoot, they dip an arrow in the black gum and cut the head just above the point with the razor-sharp tooth of a *piraña*. Thus the poisoned point will break off in the wound if the arrow falls out.

At that time we assumed that the Indians made their own poison, but we 278

278 learnt many weeks later from a *cauchero* that there were specialists in this art. The Maku, he told us, are the expert curare makers in this area. They boil the scrapings of a liana together with two herbs, then strain the liquid through leaves and boil it again until it forms a black glutinous mass. This they place in small pots and trade it with other tribes, often for food and shelter; for the Maku are nomads. Though strychnine is always the base, various ingredients are occasionally added, from ants to putrefied animal remains. The most deadly poison, which was once reserved for human beings, is said to paralyse the victim in a matter of seconds.

224 252 [123] The monkey is the most common of all the animals hunted for the pot. These are hung over a fire and smoked for days. The first time we were offered monkey, we were given the head, which we thought we were supposed to admire. But the brain, we learnt, is the greatest delicacy, like the head and eyes of a fish. The monkey often grips a branch as it dies, and for this reason the Indians would shoot many more than they ever managed to retrieve.

224 123 We never ventured to go with the Indians when they went hunting, as we would have made more noise than them and frightened the game. Moreover, we felt we could never keep up. One morning the children came to a *maloca* we were staying in to say that a *capybara* had strayed along the river bank close to where they had been bathing. Immediately an Indian picked up his bow and arrow and quickly made for the river. It was unusual for an animal to stray so close to the house and we followed at a distance hoping that we might see the hunt.

Half-crouched, with his bow and curare-tipped arrows gripped in his hand, he began to stalk the large water rat. Getting as close as he dared, he put the small beeswax quiver head down on the ground, with the arrow shafts upright. He placed one arrow in the bow. Twisting one leg around the shafts, his toes braced against the base of the quiver, he drew back the bow waiting for the *capybara* to move into the open, ready to take a second arrow from the sheath should the first miss. He held the bow fully stretched, crouched lower, hesitated for an instant, then released the arrow. The rodent [252] rolled over without a sound. No second arrow was needed. That night we boiled the *capybara* which tasted like pork. The poison never taints the meat; it only affects the nervous system through the bloodstream.

224 The tapir is the largest of the forest mammals hunted by the Indian. It is the size of a cow, with a long snout, small eyes and slotted feet, and its only defence is camouflage. Speckled brown and black like the sun-dappled forest floor, when young, and turning to a dull slate-brown when fully grown, they gather at their watering places to drink. They were hunted relentlessly by the

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000 *A Tukano shaman in festival regalia with his* kurubeti *pebble stave.*

[see p. 70-A]

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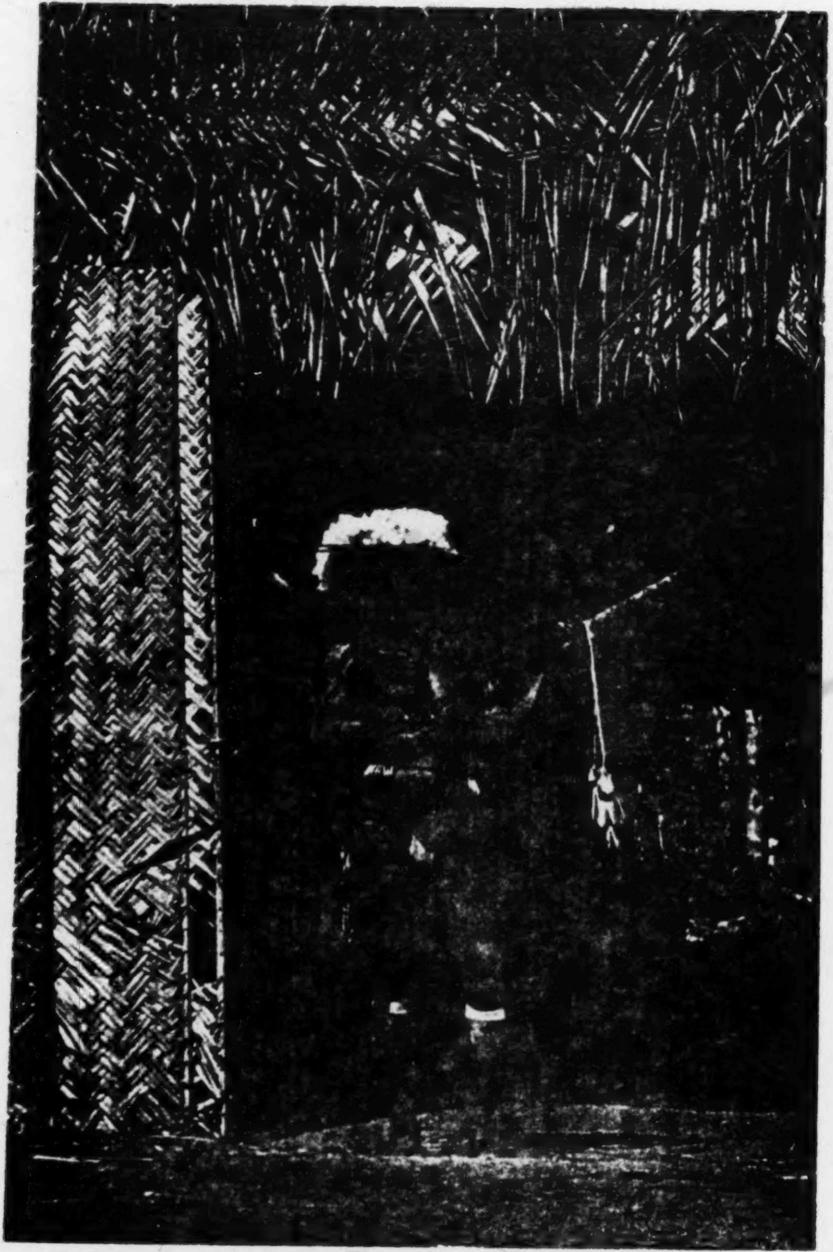

A Tukano shaman in festival regalia with his kurubeti pebble stave.

/p. 70-B/

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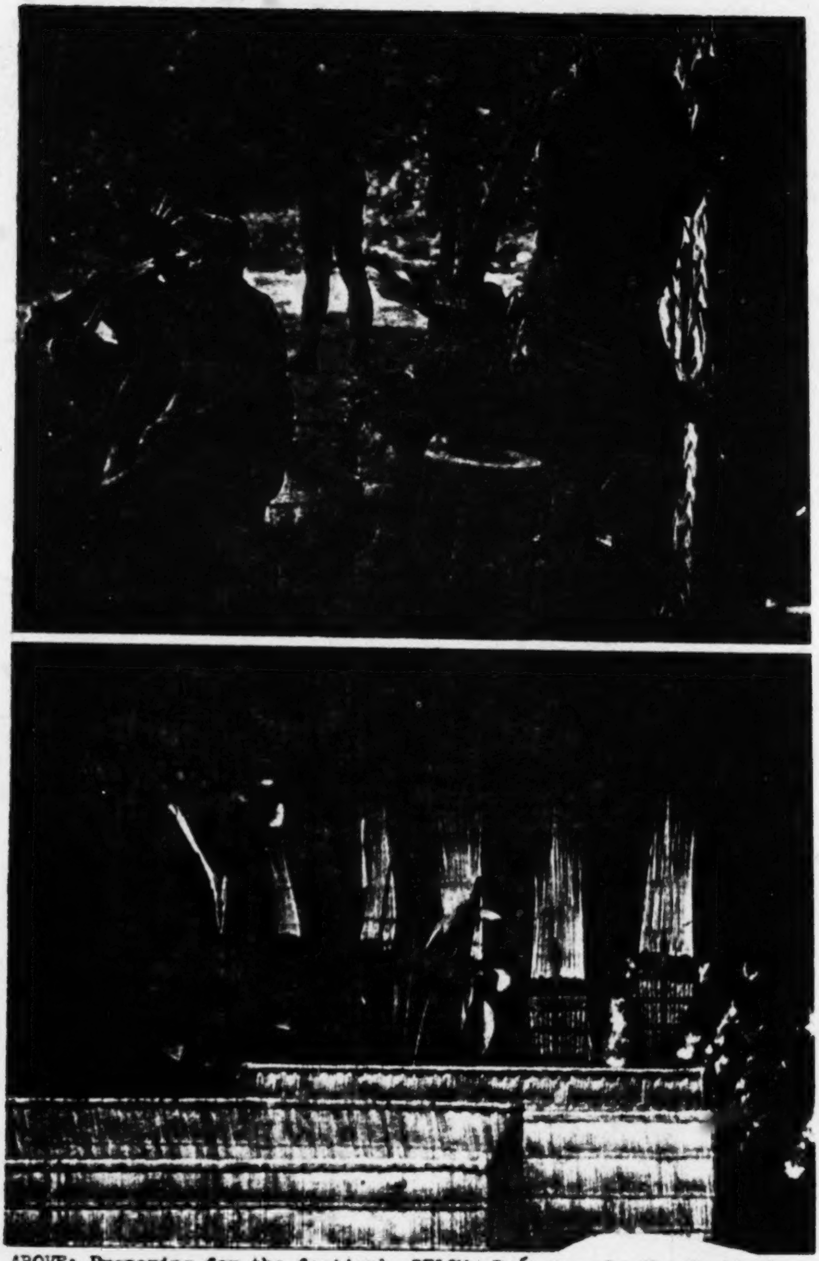

ABOVE: Preparing for the festival. BELOW: Bréo unpacks the festival feather headdresses from their boxes.

early rubber gatherers, who on occasions would shoot dozens at a time, more for sport than to supply meat. They are now nearly extinct in many areas. 224

Having killed such a large animal the difficulty is to keep the meat. The *caucheros* build great platforms over the fires and smoke it for days. This is the only way it can be preserved. It is not possible to eat very much of the rich, sweet meat at a time, and the Indians believe that at certain times of the year it is bad to touch it, for it is almost inedible and causes skin blemishes. Though the Indian professes to despise tapirs, he nevertheless assigns human characteristics to them; he believes they dance, drink *chicha* and even build *malocas*. He also believes that by eating a particular animal he may acquire some of its characteristics. From a peccary he can gain faith and resolution, for the wild boar's habit of going to the rescue of a wounded companion has left an indelible impression on the Indians. Just as the puma is credited with human characteristics, the *agouti*, like the legendary African hare, is attributed wisdom and wit. 825

The blowpipe is of as much importance to the hunter as his bow and arrow. The Tukano make their pipes from a small palm. A length of from eight to ten feet is cut and allowed to dry. The pith is removed and an inner bore put into position and polished with tree roots. The outside is bound along its whole length with bark and covered with a resinous wax. A small pig-bone sight is fixed on one end and a hard wooden mouthpiece on the other. The Indian will travel through the forest all day long, looking for birds, small monkeys and squirrels, and carrying his match-thin ten-inch darts, perhaps thirty at a time, in wicker holders.

He constantly watches the trees overhead; he may suddenly see a parrot on a branch ahead of him. He moves forward slowly; if he can stand directly beneath the bird he has less difficulty in steadying his aim. He raises the pipe cautiously and places the cupped lower end over his mouth. He reaches behind with his free arm and draws a poison-tipped dart. Inserting it in the shaft with its cotton wad, he aligns the pig-bone sight on to the bird and inflates his cheeks. There is a barely discernible puff. Seventy feet over his head the parrot squawks, starts to fly, falters and crashes through the branches to the ground. Sometimes there are other birds near by and the Indian will kill three or four before he begins to look for them lying somewhere in the dense thickets, but he never loses one. Parrots are the most common target and the most easily approached, but unless cooked for many hours they are quite inedible. We would occasionally make a soup from them. Macaws, toucans and egrets are sought after, more for their feathers than as food. Pigeon, turkey, duck and geese are far more palatable; while frogs, snakes and various grubs, ants and beetles are considered delicacies. 262 [825]

ABOVE: *Preparing for the festival.* BELOW: *Bréo unpacks the festival feather head-dresses from their boxes.* [see p. 70-B] 000

5

Ni

172 It was on the rapids of Kaperwa, while Brian was searching for fossils, that we came across the first rock engravings (see p. 74). These man-like figures, no more than two feet high, extended along the face of an ancient deposit of volcanic ash exposed just above river level. All seemed to be in grotesque dancing postures, their outlined figures carved half an inch into the face of the rock, their webbed hands and feet splayed out and the face portrayed in relief with indentations for the eyes and the mouth. There appeared to have been more which had been almost completely eroded away except for a hand or a foot. We found a similar set of figures extending along the rock on the other side of the channel, equally strange but portraying the same subtle vitality of movement, as if caught in some prehistoric dance.

In all we counted thirty dancers at Kaperwa. How long they had been there was impossible to say. The rock was a hard volcanic tuff. With a high river all the engravings would have been completely submerged. Those on the south bank were sheltered from the sun and mostly covered in moss. There was no pigment or colouring matter and, even had we known the period of time for which they had been submerged, the rate of erosion would have been mere conjecture. Certainly the Indians could explain nothing about them.

Later we came across many such engravings on the Apaporis and the Caquetá. Some on the Apaporis depicted human figures of obscure abstract form with the body shown as a triangle or a square and with foreshortened arms reminiscent of Chibcha art in the Colombian Andes – a civilization contemporary to that of the Incas. Near by on the same rock were two forms representing a crocodile or snake. These were the only animal designs we ever saw. On the Caquetá we found engravings of a more formalized type, seldom depicting human beings but coiled, spiralled and fretted designs; many were very elaborate and covered five or six square feet of the rock face. Some were etched half an inch or more into the hard sandstone, others were mere chipped designs on the surface.

It has been suggested that as these engravings occur mainly at rapids they are more than likely the work of passing canoe men. But it is usually only at these rapids that there are rocks on which these petroglyphs could be drawn. Moreover, many are of such elaborate design that they would take weeks to carve into the hard rock. It is possible that some in the past represented boundary marks. The Indians do not appear to recognize territorial areas within the forest, but they may have rights to fish over certain sections of the rivers. 172

It is unlikely that the engravings can be ascribed to any one period and 531
there seemed little resemblance to contemporary Indian art. Certainly 532
Tukano design is mostly limited to triangles and crosses, and relies more on colour than form. The most striking example we saw was the Tatuya *maloca* on the Piraparaná, the bark front wall of which was covered with a series of cross, square and triangle designs coloured with brown, yellow and white river clays and a black charcoal compound. But this is by far the most dramatic example of Tukano art, with the possible exception of the elaborate body painting and the magnificent head-dresses used during the festivals. Their pottery, though finely made, bears no design, except for a pot containing the narcotic *yajé*, used only by the elders during certain festivals and curing sessions. This is covered with different coloured clays, charcoal and red *karayuru* dye. Similar triangular coloured designs are also found on the *yarumo* dancing-staves.

The most common type of engraving is the fretted design on the gourd maracas used during tribal dances. One end of the pebble stave, a lance-like rattle used by the shaman, is also carved with lines and triangles together with a pattern of bird feathers, said to give it greater magical power. This stave and a drinking gourd with an elaborate circular design of triangles, loops and chevrons, we tried to obtain for our collection, but without success. Certain articles were so highly regarded by the Indians that they would not part with them, no matter what they were offered in exchange.

Of all the rock engravings we saw, that of Ni the river god (see drawing 532
on p. 31) was by far the most striking. Travelling on from Kaperwa, we 776
came to an unusually long set of rapids through which we guided the boat with our paddles. We were concentrating so hard on the rapids and the water swirling around the boat, that the unexpected sight of a pyramid of rock jutting massively out of the river in front came as rather a shock. Even more unexpected was the grotesque figure cut deeply into the granite face of the giant boulder. With arms and legs outstretched he seemed to dominate the river, to embrace it with a hypnotic spell.

Unlike the other carvings we saw, Ni was engraved in granite. The finely-drawn lines, carved half an inch deep, gave symmetry to the life-size figure which must have taken an Indian craftsman months of labour to create. Our own steel knives were easily blunted by the hard crystalline rock.

Ni faced upstream into the setting sun. Behind, on the east slope of the rock, were suns and a quarter-moon. The suns, some with emanating rays, were composed of a series of three or four concentric rings up to two feet in diameter.

115 Hitherto José had remained silent and appeared to know nothing of these engravings nor had he given us any indication of their whereabouts. This was surprising, for, being himself a Barasana, of a Tukano clan, he was presumably aware of their existence. Then one evening, perhaps encouraged by our curiosity, he told us the following anecdote:

101 'The Barasana have always lived here, they were born here. They and the
773 Taiwano have always been friends and had common enemies in the Tatuya,
776 Karapana and Ureti whom they used to fight with bow and arrows. They both have the same god who has power over all things. It is he who made Ni, in his own likeness, the drawings have been here for ever, and this is the only place where they occur. The other Indians do not have them.' He pointed to a great natural pillar of granite called the Bee, which stood in the river upstream of Ni: 'That rock was once a pile of manioc, which the people had placed there. Ni turned it into stone. Below the rapids is the underwater cave, his palace, where the god sings to the drawings and the spirits.'

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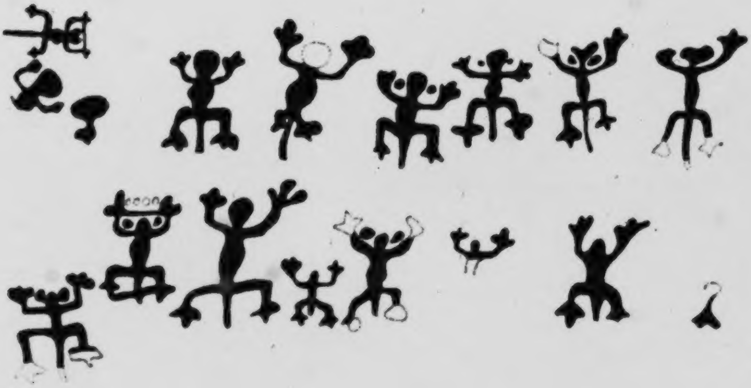

6

Panpipes and Don Giovanni

In early February we started to make a small collection. For exchange we 123
had brought rolls of coloured cloth, cigarettes, combs, thread and beads, 126
fishing line and hooks. When we arrived at a *maloca* we would give presents
to the headman and his wife, then to the rest of his family. There was never
any hesitation in allowing us to sling our hammocks in their houses, but our
giving gifts perhaps assured them of our friendly intentions. Moreover, in
return they would often give us *farinha* which would help out with our own
food. Of all the trade goods, small beads, and cloth especially in primary
colours, red, blue and yellow, were the most popular. They preferred white
beads and were prepared to exchange many of their own possessions for
them. But even if we had lived with the Indians for some time, so that they
knew us, they would have been loath to part with certain things. In order to
obtain one of their magnificent head-dresses, which may have taken a man
months to complete because of the scarcity of the feathers, we had to give
them one of our shotguns, nothing less. A shotgun was as good as a bow and [411]
arrow. For the Indian it had the advantage that you could shoot more than
one bird at a time and it had a greater range than an arrow. But for years
their gun would probably be useless because of a lack of shot and powder.
Also the gun made a great noise and this frightened the game away. The
only three we saw were ancient hammer guns, probably taken from *caucheros*
they had killed.

In one of the last *malocas* of the Piraparaná we obtained a canoe. This proved extremely useful as it could be loaded with some of the lighter equipment, such as the collection, and towed from the back of *El Diablo*. Unfortunately it was narrow and unstable and on one occasion as we passed through some turbulent water, it swung sideways in an eddy and overturned. Before we were able to do anything several pieces of our small collection had already disappeared. As a result of this we learnt to keep an Indian in the stern of the canoe to guide it.

The rivers of the Amazon are usually termed black or white, to differen- 133
tiate between clear and muddy water. Because of the amount of suspended
sediment, white rivers are said to have many more fish. There were however
a variety of fish in the 'black' Piraparaná. When we travelled on the river 226
we would often see large gate-traps at the mouths of the smaller creeks. The

226 fish hooks and line we carried for bartering were greatly sought after, though José for some reason sabotaged much of our exchange. He told the Indians that our nylon was not as good as their own *cumare* line and he broke the barbs of our steel hooks on the house posts to show that their own were better.

226 796 'That is barbasco, a poisonous liana.' José pointed to several bundles of saplings lying on the floor of a *maloca* we were visiting. 'Soon, in late February or March, before the first rains, all the Indians near here will gather for the fish poisoning. They will build small dams in the streams, and the *barbasco* will be pounded and thrown into the water above these dams. All the fish float to the surface and, with nets made from *cumare*, or long spear arrows with forked metal ends, they will be caught in great quantities and carried to a *maloca*. Usually a particular house is chosen each year and, when enough fish have been collected, the festival will start. This may go on for days with *chicha*, panpipes and painted *yarumo* dancing-staves, and many people – and more fish than we see at any other time in the year.' This was a festival we wished to see, but we did not expect to be in the Piraparaná in March. Besides they might have been reluctant to let us watch a ceremony on which the abundance of fish during the following year depended.

Four days below Ni we came to the great falls of Beiju, and there, as we dragged *El Diablo* over the portage, we met some Indians who told us they were going to a festival at a Makuna *maloca* belonging to a headman called Bréo. It was two days' journey up a tributary, but we decided to go.

The Tukano have many festivals throughout the year; among the most important are the Fish Festivals and the Harvest Festivals for the pineapple, 533 534 *miriti* palm and *guamo* fruits, and for the manioc. At all these they dance, sing and play their instruments. But to the Indian, music is also a form of relaxation and enjoyment. Often as the men laze in their hammocks they happily while away the time playing on their bamboo panpipes. Blowing across the eight- or nine-stemmed pipes two men may accompany each other for hours on end, ascending and descending the same scale, rhythmically counterbalancing one another in tuneful but repetitive melodies. They continue, apparently oblivious of repetition, and the panpipe tunes soon be- [184] came imprinted on our minds. Each clan has its own variations; most of the tunes are based on their dances, though some are in imitation of birds. At night the young boys play their pipes crouched around the central posts of the *maloca*, and the clear notes carry across the still forest like church bells ringing on a cold winter's night. Only occasionally do the Indians actually sing for enjoyment; one headman uttered a staccato war song as he pounded coca leaves and occasionally the women hummed as they rocked their babies to sleep. Their instruments are more important to them; of these the snail-shell and deer-bone flutes, the tortoise shells and the clay horns are the most unusual.

It is hard to believe that a river-snail shell no more than three inches long can produce a most haunting tune. This tiny flute, the three-holed *sihoo*, is 533 more often played outdoors than inside the house. Its clear rippling notes 534 mingle with the forest calls, perhaps imitating a bird drawn closer and closer to the Indian hunter. The deer-bone flute, in contrast, has a harsh, piercing, eerie sound. It is made from a deer's tibia and three holes are drilled into the bone with a *capybara's* tooth. A little slit is cut into the head of the deer-bone, down which the man blows. Small lumps of beeswax are melted into the apexes and shrill notes come flowing out – bizarre perhaps, but melodious. This instrument is generally heard during the *chicha* ceremonies between the dances. The tortoise shell, too, is an instrument which has a weird, almost hypnotic tone. It is played by a man who squats on the ground with the shell gripped under the knee between thigh and calf muscles. Rapidly he rubs, almost jerks, the palm of his hand over the beeswax-coated head of the shell. Sometimes two men will play two tortoise shells and a pair of panpipes at the same time, and the continuous reverberation of the *goos*, as the tortoise shells are known, together with the syncopation of the panpipes produces an amazing effect. The high muffled tones of the *goos* echo round the *maloca*, driving the Indian's coca-bemused senses into a semi-hypnotic trance. To us this was not an unpleasant sensation and on listening closer we could pick out what was in fact a highly sophisticated rhythm. Each panpipe entered just off beat in an exciting, almost modernistic manner, more reminiscent of a modern jazz quartet than four primeval instruments of the Amazon.

Our recording equipment intrigued the Indians – those small boxes with 123 wheels which turned, lengths of 'string' with weird metal objects on the end, 533 held close to their faces or hung from the ridge poles of their *malocas*. It was all beyond their comprehension. At first they were frightened but once they had listened to their own voices and music, they were astounded and could not wait to hear more. We all too soon found ourselves using as much of our precious battery power to play back as we did to record. Sometimes they were intrigued by Western music – Beethoven piano concertos, Brahms and Gershwin had little effect, but the Bach double violin concerto drew many eager faces, a Haydn trumpet concerto brought smiles of approval and on hearing the Commendatore's deep voice in the last act of *Don Giovanni* the whole *maloca* drew near in wonder. Perhaps this really was the white man's shaman.

We waited four days at Bréo's while the women brought in baskets and 796 baskets of manioc to prepare for *chicha*, and the men pounded coca leaves incessantly. During this time the *maloca* filled with families who had travelled by canoe from their distant forest homes along the winding river courses. Some had already been warned by messengers of the coming festival to [534] celebrate the manioc harvest, but on the afternoon before it started Bréo left for a high knoll of ground, and stood blowing a clay horn – perhaps to warn

796 534 the people that the festival would start that night. The low booms rang out across the forest like blasts on a ship's foghorn. To the south, near the Caquetá, giant wooden drums were slung on a slant from two central poles of the *maloca* and beaten in a secret code as warning signals to other members of the tribe. The *mangwaré* drums were the jungle telegraph of Amazonia and their signals could be heard over twenty miles away.

796 574 More and more families arrived at the riverside port, where they left their canoes moored to the bank or tied to each other with thin strands of liana. Some thirty canoes formed a series of star-like patterns with the water rushing down between them, haphazardly tied, yet buoyant and secure. Each family made its way up the steep sandy path to the *maloca*: the men with their paddles, some with fishing rods, and many with panpipes strung to their hammocks; the women bent low under heavy loads of manioc and their babies on their hips. Here the head of each family was greeted by Bréo and shown where they could sling their hammocks around the sides of the house. The women handed the manioc to Wanina, his young wife – he had two, but the elder could no longer bear him children.

796 273 The amount of time it takes for the festival to be prepared depends on the amount of *chicha* to be consumed. With over a hundred people present, four days were barely enough for the manioc roots to be rubbed down, the poisonous juice extracted and then boiled to form the basis of *chicha*. The starch sediment was baked over the clay ovens into giant wafer-thin biscuits. The boiling liquid was poured into the long *chicha* canoe which lay on the floor between two of the central posts; the toasted cassavas were broken into the liquid and fermentation began. The *chicha* gained rapidly in potency and the canoe was covered with an exquisitely woven cane mat like Japanese lattice. One ceremonial canoe was not enough, and another was brought from the river to be filled with yet more fermenting *chicha*.

796 [787] In the evening the men sat chewing cocaine. Led by the shaman they consulted the spirits and their subdued mumblings continued far into the night. Their crouched bodies, lit only by the flickering of the resinous *turi* torchwood, reminded us of the semi-human rock carvings of their ancestors.

302 796 The *chicha* had fermented, the coca was prepared, the *maloca* was now a seething mass of people. The afternoon before the festival began, Wanina and the shaman's wife began to paint the bodies of the men. First deep red *karayuru* was smeared down the front of the torso, the thighs and along each arm with firm strokes of the fingers. A black liquid, the boiled juice from the leaves of a tree growing in their *chagras*, was painted on to the body with a three-pronged piece of cane. The hands and feet were totally blackened to above the wrists and ankles, and the arms and legs patterned with a lattice of

A head-dress made from the feathers of the royal crane. [see p. 78-A]

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A head-dress made from the feathers of the royal crane.

6: Moser & Tayler E,N-5 (1960-1961) 1967 SQ19 Tucano SQ19

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Tukano profile and festival head-dress.

diagonal lines. Then the women painted their own faces with *karayuru* and 796 blackened their hands and feet. [302]

As the sun's last rays filtered into the *maloca* and the mumblings of the council of elders died down, the shaman left the dark interior and stood in 796 front of the men's doorway. In his hand he carried the *Kurubeti*, the sacred 789 pebble stave. Intricate circles of blue and purple humming-bird feathers adorned one end, a swollen spearhead formed the other. This swelling was produced by soaking a bulge in the wood in water, then inserting this into a banana stem and heating the spearhead over a fire. The swollen wood is cut open and three pebbles are inserted. During cooling the wood shrinks and the pebbles are locked in the cavity. The shaman stood pointing the stave away from the *maloca*. He hit it with his right hand and the stave swayed from side to side in front of his body. The rattling of the pebbles prevented the evil spirits from entering the *maloca*. In the days of tribal war, we were told, among the people living further to the south, each warrior carried one of these staves and after victory would dance himself into a frenzy, beating the stave against his shoulder.

With darkness the festival began. Bréo carefully rolled back the cane mat 796 from the *chicha* canoe and the women handed round gourd after gourd, full of the bitter drink. More and more *chicha* was handed round to groups of people sitting contentedly by their family fires. Some of the younger men began to play their panpipes, but as yet there was no cohesion; the groups seemed rather to be competing with one another and different tunes came from all sides, one drowning the other. Many of these men had put sprigs of sweet-smelling leaves under their loin-cloth strings and berry arm-bands. The scent from the leaves was curiously sensuous, like sweet lemon, and used as an elixir of love by the Tukano during their festivals.

The same confused cacophony of dancing and panpipes continued well into [756] the night; it was the young men's duty to keep the shaman awake, for not once during the course of the festival was he allowed to sleep. Small groups moved up and down the *maloca*, joyfully playing their panpipes as they danced, then they retired to their family fires and drank more *chicha*. The shaman remained apart, sitting on his stool in the centre of the *maloca*, gazing as if in a trance. At his side lay a calabash of coca and the sacred pot [276] of *yajé*, the most powerful narcotic used by Amazonian Indians. Prepared from the boiled juices of a jungle creeper, the red liquid gives the shaman [787] hallucinations and he is able to predict the future progress of the festival. Suddenly he summoned Bréo to his side. All the men came to the centre of the *maloca* carrying their wooden stools and sat down near him. With heads bent low the men started a muffled chant, answering in unison the solo

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Tukano profile and festival head-dress. [see p. 78-B]

796 monotone of the shaman. At intervals the coca calabash passed from hand to hand and each man threw a deer-bone spoon of the sage-green powder into his mouth. He stored it in his cheek and gradually the coca, mixed with saliva, filtered down his throat. Louder and louder, faster and faster became the chanting, echoing between the walls of the vast dark interior. The shaman worked himself into a frenzy, waving his arms out in front of him, his hands moving in wild gesticulations, his voice a rapid series of falsetto monotones; he was expelling all evil spirits from the tribal precincts to the heads of the *caños* and to other lands. The incantations continued for nearly two hours and then in the early hours of the morning there was silence.

796 The time had arrived for Bréo to unlock the precious box of plumages
301 and he lowered it to the floor. He unwrapped the barkcloth cover and took off
the lid of the beautifully woven palm box. Item by item he distributed the contents to the waiting figures, eagerly clambering to adorn themselves. First the smaller boys were given their simple crowns of red and yellow macaw and toucan tail-feathers, and they dashed away to adjust these on their heads. Underneath lay monkey-fur belts, ancient quartz pendants, puma-tooth necklaces and the most important items of all, magnificent feather head-dresses. These Bréo carefully selected and gave to the elders of the tribe. Crowns of toucan feathers woven on *cumare* frames adorned their heads, brilliant gold and red, ringed with white duck-down. Majestic royal crane plumage, stuck into a banana stem which projected down the back, jutted vertically up from the back of the head. The white feathers were woven together in a *cumare* mesh and stood out like quivering spindles of spun glass, gleaming in the darkness. Behind was a single red macaw tail-feather, a deer bone bound to the banana stem with monkey fur and last of all the wing plumage of an egret.

301 Many of the men wore giant quartz obelisks dangling from their necks.
They make them no more, but their ancestors used to spend days rubbing
down large chunks of quartz in pebbleworn channels in the river beds.
Others had necklaces of wild boars' tusks, pointing concentrically outwards.
There were many monkey-fur armlets with glistening beetle wings which
[292] jingled as the men moved. Around the waist was another belt of monkey
fur with puma teeth attached; below the knees finely-woven *cumare* garters,
rubbed yellow with river clay, and above the right ankle dried *watcha* nut
[302] rattles. This, with the fierce red facial paint and black body design, made up
the splendid dancing regalia of the Tukano. The women had no adornments;
[562] south of the Caquetá they stuck rings of white duck-down to their ankles
with mud, but here they only painted their faces and bodies.

796 Now the dancing proper began. Since it was the manioc festival only the
535 ceremonial *Nahubasa*, signifying the complete cycle of manioc from the time
it was planted to the time it became cassava, was danced. Each man carried a
long cane stave in his right hand and they joined in a line across the centre of

the *maloca*, facing the women's quarters. Dazed from the *chicha* and coca they 796
gazed in front of them and sang a slow dirge, beating their staves on the 535
ground. Slowly they moved off in a clockwise circle inside the four central posts. The tempo increased, but the chant remained the same, the voices grew louder and combined with the hollow thuds from the staves and castanet-like rattles. The whole atmosphere changed, no longer were there rival groups competing with their neighbours, instead everyone took part in the dance. The women joined in, slipping their small bodies under the linked arms of the moving men. The circle increased, the women with their right hand to the small of the back of one man, and their left to the hip of another. Only Wanina, the headman's wife, accompanied by her small children and carrying Bréo's youngest son under her arm, did not join the circle. She moved slowly round the centre, her eyes fixed constantly to the ground, uttering a high-pitched wail as the dancers moved solemnly about her.

The manioc dance continued through the night, but with the approach of dawn the younger members became impatient for a change of rhythm. To them such festivals were an opportunity for amusement, heavy drinking bouts and the possibility of finding a wife. One or two started to play on their panpipes, they were joined by others and soon the whole *maloca* became alive with young couples and trios weaving happily across the floor, in between the posts and along the sides of the house. Their young bodies gliding through the darkness, their feet delicately stamping the time on the ground, they seemed completely lost in the lovely panpipe tunes of the *chiruru*, the Tukano courtship dance. All too soon the thuds of the bamboo staves were heard and the elders again took control.

Throughout the entire festival the dominating figure was the shaman. 796
Existing as he does in complete detachment from the rest, he sat alone, 756
occasionally taking snuff from his snail-shell box. It was he who influenced 789
the festival which, without him, would not take place. Every few hours he summoned the elders about him and as coca was passed round the mysterious chanting began. No one would tell us what was being recited, we could only gather that the tribal ancestors were being consulted and evil spirits exorcized. They did not like us to record this part of the ceremony, for quite understandably they believed we might take away their magic power.

Day and night the people danced, their plumed bodies glistening with 796
sweat, caught in the beams of the sun or the dull glow of the torch-wood. There was continual sound – of panpipes, of cane staves, nutshell rattles and people's voices. Gradually the *chicha* canoes were drained. Gallons of the liquid had been consumed and the men had to rid themselves of their hang-
overs. Nonchalantly they poured boiled green-pepper juice down their [757]
nostrils from funnels made of leaves. With grunts and snorts they cleared their heads and staggered down to the river to bathe. Inside the *maloca* those that remained were asleep; many of the women had already left for the

796 *chagra* and the visiting families began to leave. They moved quietly in single file down to their canoes, unleashed them and paddled away. Life returned to normal. The plumages stood in the sand, shimmering in the sun, before Bréo meticulously packed them away, and with them remained the memory of the dancing figures, resplendent as birds of paradise.

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000 ABOVE LEFT: *An Indian taking snuff; round his neck a quartz pendant and a necklace strung with jaguar teeth.* ABOVE RIGHT: *Boy playing panpipes.* BELOW: *A headman lights a torch of beeswax.* [see p. 82-A]

/p. 82-A/

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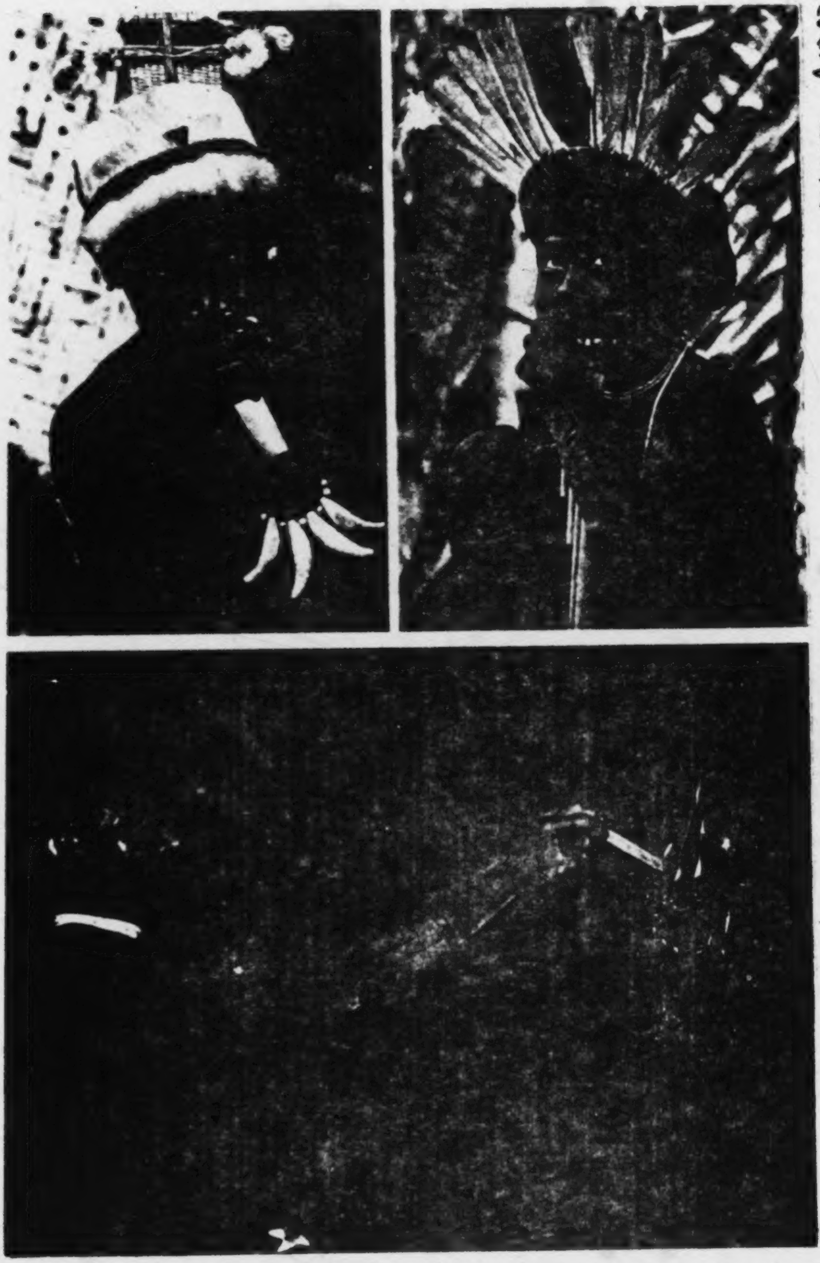

ABOVE LEFT: An Indian taking snuff; round his neck a quartz pendant and a necklace strung with jaguar teeth. ABOVE RIGHT: Boy playing pan-pipes. BELOW: A headman lights a torch of beeswax.

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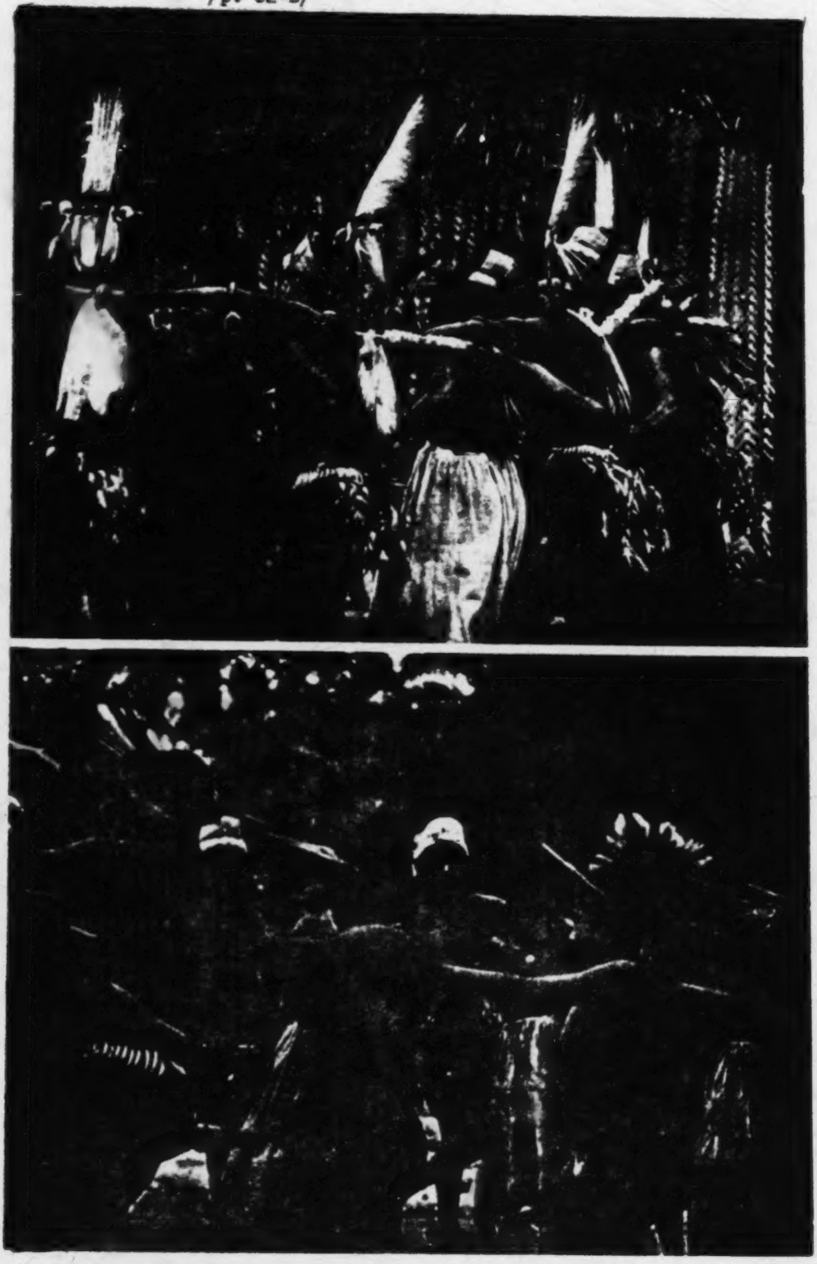

ABOVE AND BELOW: Dancing at the festival to celebrate the manioc harvest.

7

Missing Links

Until we had passed the last rapids on the Piraparaná we were always anxious, 114
as we were never sure how long José would stay with us. Had he left us we might have found it difficult to get other Indians to help, and certainly we could never have managed *El Diablo* ourselves. There were many occasions when he had threatened to leave, but so far he had been persuaded not to. So it was with some relief that we passed these rapids, though there was nearly disaster, for José determined to take *El Diablo* through fully loaded. We watched aghast from the bank as for a moment the boat completely disappeared from view in the turbulent water. But somehow she stayed afloat.

Now the river was anything from thirty to a hundred yards across. It 13
wound sluggishly this way and that between low banks covered in dense 114
forest and bordered with *miriti* palms. There were no houses, for most of the land was liable to flooding during the wetter months. We saw no Indians on the river, nor any canoes moored to the banks. At times the river meandered forming giant oxbows, where, through the sparse jungle, we could see a bend in the river that we had passed perhaps an hour before. At one of the bends a low cliff rose sheer from the water's edge. It was formed from clay and shales of Tertiary age, and in the beds Brian found deposits of lignite, tree-trunks and plant remains. To the west of us lay the Apaporis, to the east [101]
continuous forest as far as the Río Negro, the home of strange, seldom-seen foresters, the nomadic Maku.

Since leaving Bréo's *maloca* we had been troubled less by flies and insects; 136
the jigger worms, which had laid their eggs in our feet when we walked 114
barefoot about the *malocas*, no longer bothered us. Only the *nutchis* remained as they took some days to incubate. One night after an exceptionally large one was removed from Donald's shin, he wrote, 'A rather painful process. However it had its reward for it was definitely a record breaker – fat, furry, and fully half an inch in length....' They could only be extracted by using nicotine to poison them, or rubber latex to block their breathing holes where they lay under the skin. We never learnt how we got these painful worms.

ABOVE AND BELOW: *Dancing at the festival to celebrate the manioc harvest.*
[see p 82-B]

114 136 Probably they resulted from a small fly or mosquito injecting the egg into the bloodstream. Horacio had come across them in the Llanos, but only in cattle and dogs, never in humans.

Though seldom bothered by mosquitoes we occasionally ran into a belt of the *pium* fly which could give very irritating bites. At night when we found a sand-spit, or dry ground in the forest where we could sling our hammocks in the trees, we would first inspect the ground to ensure that our equipment would not be covered in termites or ants by the morning. Fish, which the Indians caught for us, was now our main food. One type looked and tasted almost like salmon; another, a flat fish, was very similar to the *piraña* with its razor teeth and protruding lower jaw. Even in February, towards the end of the dry season, many days were overcast. When the sun did appear, it was usually followed by a heavy afternoon rainstorm often accompanied by a cold wind, so that in spite of our nylon jackets we found ourselves shivering with cold. One day we passed very close to a green water snake. It coiled itself and thrashed the water with its tail, its head out of sight, until it finally disappeared locked in the jaws of its invisible assailant.

Along the river banks and high in the trees overhead, we saw herons, ibis and egrets, a brownish bird similar to a bittern; king-fishers, not so brilliantly coloured as the British kind, and duck would rise off the water in front of the boat. The varying shades of green were broken by white hibiscus, the crimson flowers of the chocolate tree, the flashing blue wings of the giant morphous butterfly or the wasp yellow of a swallowtail, beautiful butterflies which sting like fire-ants as caterpillars and live on blood, offal and manure. Sometimes the transparent glinting wings of a dragonfly passed by, while at night shadowy nightjars flitted over the river between the pin-point glows of the fireflies.

114 133 On the evening of the second day after leaving the rapids we sighted the Apaporis, a river of strange contrasts with its great width, muddy banks and putty-coloured water. We had decided to reach the falls of Jirijimo. They were alleged to be a magnificent sight when the river was in full spate. A few people had seen the falls from the air, though in the days of the rubber boom the river was used as a highway, and the *caucheros* had made ramps through the forest as a portage. But this movement up and down the river had always been during the wet season, and we were travelling during the last month of summer, when in fact the river was at its lowest ebb.

For two days we moved up the Apaporis after making a dump of all our equipment, including the Indian canoe which we hid in the forest, for we knew we would have to return the same way. On the evening of the second day we reached the falls of Playa, somewhere below Jirijimo. In the winter it would have been possible to have hauled the boat on to the great sandstone slabs and pulled it up the ramps, which, though terribly overgrown during 114 the last thirty years of disuse, could have been cleared sufficiently. But now

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to our dismay we were confronted with the magnificent but daunting falls. The river tumbled a vertical forty feet over the lip of the basin into the turbulent water below, with a roar and a mass of spray, while all around were sheer walls of rock.

We tried to find a solution. We spent a day walking up the river only to find more falls above Playa. Somewhere behind, further up the river, lay Jirijimo, but how far away we did not then know. Should we try to walk through the jungle to the falls, even if it meant several days' journey without any certainty of finding them at the end? This might have been our best chance. Should we return to pick up our small Indian canoe, and carry that over the falls? It would take too long and we did not have the reserve of fuel. Could the five of us manage to pull *El Diablo* up the vertical face and, once over that, find our way up the next falls? As the boat was already in a flimsy condition, it seemed unlikely that she would remain in one piece. She would have to survive the return journey as well, and we did not relish the thought of walking to the Caquetá.

That night Brian, who had remained the most undaunted, wrote in his diary, 'We clambered over the rocks and through the very overgrown and at times almost vertical ramp – this will prove a hellish problem with only five of us and a boat which is semi-rotten, held together by beeswax and old trouser legs....' The following day: 'We all seemed in a bleary state, probably because *a fondo* all of us knew this would be the furthest we would get ... I still think we could make it, but the time factor and the risk involved to the whole expedition just do not make the attempt worthwhile.'

Realizing the futility of continuing, we prepared to spend another night below the falls. Over the river a tern circled, hovered, dived into the water with a splash, came up, then dived again, on and on till the dusk turned the greens to black. The moon rose high, the colour of straw changing to a white so brilliant that we could read in our hammocks. The water moving down from the falls was covered with a froth of giant bubbles, making the surface look like an ice-floe, dazzling white in the moonlight. The following day we turned back the way we had come. Some hours after starting Horacio found that he had left his rifle behind, so we had to return to the falls. That night we all seemed a little despondent; we still had a long way to go and we did not know what lay ahead. There was no need to build a shelter or raise a tarpaulin, the sky was clear and the sands still hot from the day-long sun. Earlier we had washed our clothes in the river and bathed, sliding our feet along the muddy bottom; for there were rays, and by doing this there was less risk of stepping on one. Along the edge of the sand-spit were the cloven-hoofed slots of a tapir, and the rounded pad marks of a puma. Perhaps that night we had disturbed many forest animals at their usual watering place, the only sandbank for many miles along this side of the river. Overhead hung the Milky Way and Orion's Belt – with the binoculars we could see

114 the nebula in his sword. Sirius stood out a pale electric blue and later we could see the Morning Star in the east.

The river was wide and very shallow, and we got into difficulties: 'José went to sleep on the engine and we hit a rock in midstream – a horrible grinding noise as it passed under the boat, then a crash as it hit the engine. She is letting a lot of water in, though it does not seem to have damaged her seriously. We are lucky; if this had been an aluminium boat she would have ripped from end to end.'

Two days below the falls we reached our dump again and reloading our equipment set off downstream, waving goodbye to Uriel who set off for his *maloca* on the Querarí; only José now remained. *El Diablo* was fully loaded again, she began leaking badly and Horacio made running repairs as we moved down the river. Soon a wind got up, the water became very choppy and we found ourselves baling continuously as the water slopped over her two or three inches of freeboard. She was not going to last very much longer.

All along the banks the forest presented a solid wall. There were seldom any
175 breaks where there might have been a habitation. A clan of the Tukano, the
Letuama, had lived here before the advance of the rubber barons early in the
342 century. A few still remained and we visited one of their houses. The *maloca*
was shaped like a pagoda, quite unlike anything we had seen before, round
at the base with a steeply slanting thatched roof, terminating in a ridge
about thirty feet above the hard earth-baked floor. Inside, every sheaf of
each section of thatch seemed to have been measured and the whole had an
appearance of amazing symmetry. The light came in through two roof aper-
tures and inside, though cool, it was nearly as bright as outdoors. This was
surprising as the darkness of the Amazonian house is a deterrent to flying
[415] insects. In strange contrast to the house were the old aluminium pots and
tin trunks lying inside – a sharp reminder that we had left the Piraparaná.
The headman and his family had deserted the house and it was now used by
the occasional passing Indian as a resting-place.

114 We met two *caucheros* who had their houses on the river bank. One of them, Alirio, was half-Indian by birth. His father had been a European-educated official of the Colombian government, who in his later years had preferred the life of the forest. Alirio had known no other life; he had married an Indian girl and now spent his days collecting wild rubber, selling it to another *cauchero* further down the river. He was talkative and eager to help; he told us of a botanist – Dr Schultes – whom he had accompanied beyond the first rapids on the Piraparaná. When he knew we had come all the way from the Vaupés he seemed almost disbelieving. He told us on no account should we continue all the way to the Caquetá on this river, for there were many rapids; moreover, nearer the mouth of the river there were falls, one nearly as big as Jirijimo. Our only way was by a portage which led through the forest to another river, the Miritiparaná. From there it was possible, he

said, to travel all the way to the Caquetá without encountering more rapids. 114
We would have to leave our boat behind on the Apaporis, as it would be impossible to take it across without the assistance of many Indians. We would have to get help from the Miritiparaná, and a boat, in order to continue our journey to the Caquetá. This was the first time that we knew exactly what lay ahead of us; from then on we would follow Alirio's instructions. He kindly sent his son and one of his workmen to help us over the rapids which we had to pass before the portage. That night we came to Lugo's house where we had a less friendly welcome. Heavy-set, urbane and gold-toothed, Lugo offered us little. We asked if we could sling our hammocks in the house and he grudgingly consented; so Brian asked him to join us in a meal. Horacio was furious. 'Why?' he said. 'Why should we offer him our hospitality?... It is for him to invite us.'

The following day, as we continued down the river, we wondered why Lugo should have been forced to live out his life in the forests of the Amazon. Surely it could not have been his wish; and what did he fear in strangers? Perhaps it was better than a lifetime in gaol. Later, while we were collecting 172
rock samples, we came across the rock carvings called Boheniambo. Scattered over the flat sandstone island in the centre of the river, these formalized carvings, none of them more than two feet long, seemed to be imitations of Chibcha art from the Andean highlands. The figures, with stylized triangular head, square body and foreshortened arms crossed in front of the chest, were a contrast to the more natural art of the Piraparaná.

There was no moon that night and the rain clouds were heavy, as we tried 114
to find the small hut which would show where the portage lay. Flashing our torch along the bank we became anxious. Somewhere below us lay more rapids and we were afraid of being swept away into them. Suddenly the beam of the torch showed up a small grass-roofed shelter – it was the portage. We knew the worst of our journey was over. The same night Horacio went ahead with José to see if he could make contact with a *cauchero*, Don Carlos, whom Alirio had spoken of. We unloaded *El Diablo* for the last time, for here she had to be abandoned.

Don Carlos greeted us as if passing travellers were an everyday occurrence. Tall, slim and proud, like a Bogotano, he was the last person we would have expected to find here. Though he wore a pyjama top and had a towel round his neck to flick flies and wipe the sweat from his forehead, he looked as if he might be equally at home in a dark suit, with white collar and furled umbrella.

In no time our great heap of equipment was whisked away by Indian helpers across the portage. The difficulties we had foreseen seemed to vanish. Five hours later we were sitting down to a magnificent meal of chicken and rice in Don Carlos's wooden-frame house, surrounded by green banana palms and manioc plantations overlooking the muddy Miritiparaná.

Tukano

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648 That evening the conversation turned to rubber, the exploitation of the Indians and the atrocities. There had been two booms in the area. The first died out with the end of the First World War and the increased production in Malaya. Then with the Japanese occupation of South-East Asia during the Second World War, attention again switched to the Amazon and this continued into the fifties. Now only small interests remain and although the Indians are well paid and housed, the old fear of the *caucheros* is still there and many prefer to live their own lives.

Carlos told us that he had sixteen Indians working for him. Most of them only worked during the summer months – from November to March – when the forest was drier. If there was rain the latex from the wild rubber could not be collected. During the winter months the Indians returned to their homes to attend to their *chagras*. The men cut traces through the forest at fifty-yard intervals within easy shouting distance of one another, so that none of the trees are missed. Each morning they place small wooden cups beneath a fresh slash in the bark, returning later to empty the latex into rubber bags slung on their backs. A different section of the forest is covered each day until the cycle is completed and they start again. When the rubber is brought back to the house formic acid is added, though any organic acid can be used, even lemon juice. This coagulates the rubber which is then rolled into sheets, some of which Carlos showed us hanging from the roof-beams of his house.

At the end of a season's gathering the rubber is shipped in bales up the Caquetá to Araracuara. From there it is flown to the merchants in Bogotá – usually in May and June – and Carlos added, 'This is about the only time in the year when I see civilization. To save costs we arrange that the plane brings all our supplies and merchandise for the next year on its inward journey. These are mainly for the Indians, for there is nothing he can buy with money here, so I keep a small trade store.'

000 Later Carlos spoke of the Missing Link or Loys' Ape, which he maintained lived in the area. Three years before, one of his young workers was out in his rubber trace when he was suddenly attacked by a beast, which held him fastened to the ground all night. The boy who had fainted from fear, was found the next day and brought to Carlos's house where he took forty-eight hours to recover. He was thoroughly washed but the foul smell of the beast was impossible to remove. Several rubber gatherers claim to have seen the ape in the area of the Miritiparaná. Something very similar has also been reported from the Llanos, in the wooded river valleys near the Orinoco.

537 Stories of the half-human ape are as common as those of lost cities, the Amazonian women and the tribes of white Indians who hunt by night. All occur in the myth and legends of the tribes. But to hear a first-hand account of this ape-man from a reliable witness was unusual.

114 Before dawn we set off down river in Carlos's long, narrow, shallow-draught Caquetá boat, faster and more graceful than the stouter ones of the

Vaupés. Horacio said that every river he had known on the Orinoco and Amazon had something different about it. Each had its own character, its individual appearance; in the same way you could almost tell a river by the boats on it and the way they were handled.

As we travelled down the twisting river we passed an old covered launch going up to the Mission Station. A rotund and bald padre standing at the wheel gave us a cheerful wave as the boat chugged on its way. Close behind him came a canoe full of tin-helmeted anti-malarial workers. We reflected that one day they might reach the Piraparaná and daub their black DDT stamps over the *maloca* entrances. That night we camped on a long sand-bar and, armed with shotgun and torches, we dazzled the crocodiles. Few of them were more than five feet long. Carlos shot at them before they could run off the spit into the water. One was half-stunned by the roar of a near miss; his back glistening emerald-green in the torchlight, he glared defiance at us as we slipped a noose about his belly. We had had a request from Dr Medem, the zoologist in Bogotá, to bring a crocodile back, alive. Luckily, perhaps, he escaped a few days later.

The Caquetá seemed like a great lake studded with sandbanks and wooded islands. It was impossible to tell at a glance which way the water was flowing. We learnt the reason for this as we came to the rapids of Cordoba. These acted as a dam and funnelled a river over a mile wide through a channel no more than a hundred yards across. Keeping well to the right bank, we passed through the swirling white water and rocky projections without mishap. Two days later four convicts escaped from the national prison at Araracuara; being unfamiliar with the river they took the left bank of the rapid in their flimsy raft, only to be swept into a whirlpool. The two who survived were taken prisoner by the frontier-post guards. They had been less than ten miles from the Brazilian border and freedom.

Two hours below the rapids we saw a white statue of the Virgin Mary overlooking the river and, behind, the green sward and grey huts of La Pedrera, the military border post. There we could put through a radio call – a Catalina would pick us up and we would be back in Bogotá in forty-eight hours. It was an incredible thought. On the bank where we moored the boat there was an old wooden bandstand, like those you find in an Oslo park. Inside was a barber's chair and a broken mirror. We looked at our three-month-old beards, our sun-blackened faces – and laughed.

But that evening as we glumly surveyed the pile of equipment and the collection, we pondered on the Commandante's words: 'No plane will land here on the river, there have been too many accidents in the past. Besides, we have no means of communication, the transmitter has broken down. I am sorry . . .!'

What were we to do? It was better that one of us should make contact as soon as possible, so Brian travelled down river to the Brazilian frontier post.

000 A week later an Air Force Catalina flew in from Belem and he was allowed to travel on it to Leticia. There he notified the naval authorities of our plight, and requested passages on a Colombian gunboat which was to call at La Pedrera if the low river level would allow it.

We paid José his salary but he seemed angry that it was so little. Someone found Brian's lost watch in his baggage and he was put in detention by the soldiers. Before we could intervene he had escaped and returned to the forest. A week later the gunboat got through, and Donald and Horacio travelled down river again on the Yarrow-built *Cartagena*. Twice she went aground in the shallow Caquetá and had to be moved by manpower. All on board had to stand up to their necks in water for hours on end. In the early days of March we reached the Amazon. After travelling upstream for four days and nights, we arrived in Leticia with all the equipment, including the Tukano canoe.

And Nestor? He had decided, perhaps wisely, not to join us. We had already left Mitú before he could get any communication through to us, and after that it was too late. So maps, food and fuel await the next traveller to pass the same way, over the portage to Kuarumey's and the *malocas* of the Piraparaná.

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Epilogue

1. COLOMBIAN KALEIDOSCOPE

It was July before we left the Motilon. Nearly ten months had passed since 000
we first set out. We had visited four Indian tribes, each for a few weeks, and had had a glimpse at a fifth. Now it seemed time to take stock, not only of what was left to do, but of what had already been done. What in fact had been done? All our experiences seemed fragmentary, superficial. We had a veritable kaleidoscope of memories of Indians – impressions, no more.

Perhaps it would have been better to have lived with one tribe during 121
those ten months and learnt more about them. But then we would have defeated our purpose which was to record the music of several tribes. Had we lingered with one group we should never have completed the whole. This was always our dilemma. But what could we have gained by staying longer? None of us, with the exception of Nestor, was academically qualified to study an Indian tribe, and to our misfortune he could come on only two of our journeys. What were we then? Perhaps we could have called ourselves adventurers or explorers, but these names are anachronisms in the twentieth century. Perhaps we were just travellers, human beings trying to catch a glimpse of another kind of man, the South American Indian, that strange perceptive being who is fast disappearing off the face of the earth.

What surprised us most was the diversity of these Indians. One tends to 000
think all Indians alike, living in primeval forest, wearing barkcloth and covered in paint. But every Indian we met was very much an individual personality. Some were gay, others sad, some shy, others aggressive, tall, short and fat, fine-looking and ugly; taken as a whole one might describe them as introspective, reserved and very independent.

Like the individual, the tribes also were diverse, each one to a greater or lesser extent influenced by its environment – Noanamá, Tukano, Kogi and Motilon, and also Guajiro, though of these last our impressions were as fleeting as our days among them were few.

The four tribes could be more simply classified by grouping the Noanamá 171
and Tukano together. They were living under fairly similar conditions, 105
those of the tropical forest. Their fishing and hunting existence was in many respects alike, as was much of their material culture. Moreover, in the social sense, both tribes showed an absence of any central authority or chieftain;

171 the only authority lay with the heads of the houses, and the considerable
105 but not excessive influence of the shaman. In addition, the family groupings within the scattered forest *malocas* and waterside stilted houses, in the ceremonies and, to a lesser extent, their art and music, all seemed to show a certain relationship.

They recognized a supreme being. He had little effect on their everyday lives, he was something remote but nevertheless present. What the Tukano called him we never knew – he may have been Jurupari; to the Noanamá he was Evandama. There were also the spirits of the forest and the ancestors. To them Severiano sang his Canta Haí, to them the Tukano shaman chanted during the festival on the Piraparaná. There was the custom among Noanamá boys and girls of putting flowers in their hair and in the holes bored in their ears, which prompted Nestor to remark that they were almost Polynesian, and we found later that the Tukano had the same habit.

There were differences too: the partly sedentary cultivation of the Noanamá and their dependence on maize, compared with the shifting agriculture of the Tukano and their staple of manioc. There were differences in craftsmanship and design: pottery, basket weaving and the methods of making canoes, to mention but a few.

But what does all this tell us? Here were two peoples living six hundred miles apart, divided by the high Andes. It only tells us that at some time in the past there was a contact, perhaps a migration, or even that they formed one major group which was divided by the Chibcha advance.

The Motilon and Kogi – and this includes the Bintukua – were essentially highland dwellers, the one living in the lower 'cloud forest', the other in the high savannah tundra. The most noticeable thing about them was that they wore clothes; the Motilon a long cloak reaching to his ankles, the Kogi a jerkin, trousers and a sash. They had developed the use of the loom and wove cotton, *fiqué* sisal and even wool, unlike the forest dwellers who would still have gone naked or worn barkcloth but for the influx of trade cotton. Moreover, they rarely used body paint. We only once saw a Motilon painting his face – which they do when they go to war.

Perhaps their most distinctive feature is that, unlike the tropical forest dwellers, they live in small settlements and villages: the wattle-walled houses of the Sierra de Perijá with the surrounding barricade as a defence against the depredations of wild animals and warlike neighbours, and the small, round, wattle-and-daub temples and houses of the high Sierra Nevada.

It has been said of the Amazonian Indian: 'One word from the chief and everyone does exactly as he pleases.' This is a dictum which could apply equally to the Tukano or the Noanamá. In a way this lack of authority, this

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Guajiro women take in water from Rigtender.
[See p. 178-A]

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6: Moser & Tayler   E,N-5   (1960-1961)   1967   SQ19 Tucano
Goajiro SC13

/p. 170-A/

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Guajiro women take in water from *Rigtender*.

6: Moser & Tayler   E,N-5   (1960-1961)   1967   SQ19 Tucano
Goajiro SC13

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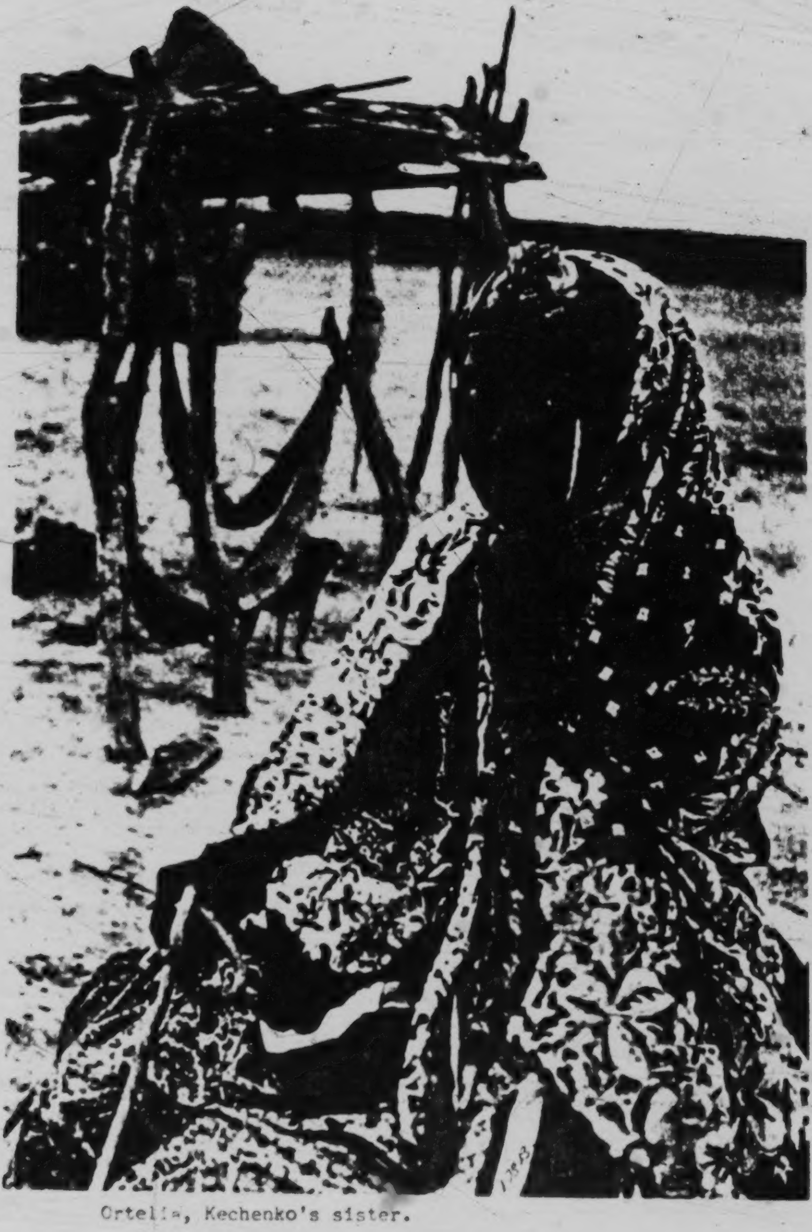

Ortelia, Kechenko's sister.

nonchalance seems to add to their charm, it makes life a little happy-go-lucky. But not so with the highlanders. Here one senses authority and a martial spirit, particularly among the Motilon who were always itching for a fight; frustrated perhaps at being unable to fight other groups, they resorted to fighting amongst themselves, always clutching their sheaves of arrows and twanging their bowstrings in anger. Here – and among the Kogi too – we found aggressiveness; underneath they were still the same humorous, perceptive people, but outwardly they wore an air of purposefulness, as if life had become a serious matter. To the Kogi life had become more than that; they had a duty to live by the rules of their priests. This was the wish of their mother goddess Nabulwé, the supreme power in their lives. It seemed to us at the time that a Kogi set down beside a Tukano would have found him as alien to his conception of a human being as we ourselves were; yet both are Indians. 171 105

The most primitive of all South American Indians is the wandering nomadic Maku, still to be found in the isolated depths of the Amazon forests, living solely on what he can gather with a stone axe as his only implement. He still represents Stone Age man. At the other end of the scale is the monotheistic Kogi, the nearest present-day equivalent we saw to the highest state of culture the Indian has reached. Between these extremes are such tribes as the Tukano, Noanamá and Motilon, each in a sense representing a different stage in development.

On the one hand are cultural traits which denote common origin or the influence of early migrations. On the other hand is the diversity representing stages of social development which were still evolving at the time of the Spanish conquest and which since then have each, in varying degrees and at different times, been subjected to a completely new force – European culture in all its complexity.

And how did the different tribes react to this influence? Generally speaking, the forest lowlanders like the Tukano have survived longer because of their remoteness. Yet when a contact is made the shock is great and their lack of cohesion may lead to rapid extinction.

The highlander, who in most instances has been in contact with the European for centuries, has – perhaps because of the greater cohesion imposed by the Kogi priests and the Motilon chiefs – either wholly resisted or adapted himself to the new influence in such a way that much of his own culture is incorporated in the new, as has happened in Atanquez, and indeed in the case of countless thousands who in the past four and a half centuries have become fully integrated into a European society.

There are very few places left in the world where the notion of Western

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Ortelia, Kechenko's sister. [see p. 178-B] 000

171 105 culture is unknown. There may still be one or two isolated hill tribes in New Guinea; and wandering-nomadic groups of foresters like the Amazonian Maku. The Tukano certainly were not isolated in this sense. Some of them had had direct contact with the rubber collectors of the early part of the century, and many of them today still tap rubber. It is possible that the obvious signs of depopulation among the people of the Piraparaná are due to this yearly migration of the younger men. Essentially, however, they remain simple uncomplicated people believing in an amazing world of spirits and demons and quite happy in that belief; taking part in their festivals with great gusto, extremely creative with their beautiful head-dresses, woven baskets and pottery, to mention but a few of their artefacts, and delighting in their music. Perhaps we influenced them unduly in this last respect. Perhaps when we left, the panpipes were put back on their neglected wall. But this is unlikely.

Nor were the Noanamá completely isolated. Among them one felt a growing conflict between the negro settlers and the Indian. We recalled an argument between Severiano and an old negro: in a rage Severiano had shouted, 'Respect me!' Perhaps the negro's cheerful arrogance infuriated the Indian more than the taking of his land. Then there was the Mission. We had seen Severiano calling to the ancestors with his Canta Haí sticks in front of him, facing a lighted candle under an image of the Virgin Mary. The Indians were gradually disappearing from the San Juan and moving northwards to Panama, in a pathetic attempt to continue the only way of life they knew.

But the Motilon were different, and the Kunuguasaya had adopted an openly hostile attitude towards all intruders. To this day they remain, like the Maku, almost unknown – but not because of inaccessibility or remoteness. The Yuco-Chaké, however, whom we visited, though still extremely warlike among themselves, are not so much under the influences of *colono* expansion from the plains as of the work of the missionaries.

000 If only in the past the missionaries could have concentrated less on the outlawing of those aspects of tribal life which constituted the very basis, the very roots of Indian existence – their spiritual and ceremonial life, which ran completely contrary to the teaching of Christianity. If only they could have restrained their overwhelming zealousness to eradicate these and tried to understand them and show tolerance instead. Then the inevitable shock to the Indians would have been less – of losing their own beliefs in the face of a religion apparently far more terrible, one that involved only one alternative to eternal damnation and hell, which was so totally at variance with their own charming optimism for a better life to come. This was followed by a second more lasting shock, the realization that few but missionaries really practised this faith – and to the Indian religion was part of his being. Then their despair and disillusion could have been softened.

Colombian Kaleidoscope

The real tragedy of it is this. Why should it be necessary to change the 000 lives of these people at all? Why cannot they all be left like the Kogi who, it seems, have survived four and a half centuries of independence? But one has to consider the strength of Kogi society, something which the Amazonian has never acquired. Moreover, the Kogi have isolated themselves in such a way that the land they occupy can be of little use to the *colono*. If change does come, as it surely must, then it will take place in the same way as has happened to the Bintukua, the Atanquez creole and countless thousands of Colombian Indians.

Nevertheless, whether integration with another culture is involved, or simply extinction of the tribe, in the long run it means the loss of a way of life, be it the disciplined life of the Kogi or the insouciance of the Amazonian – a way of life from which we ourselves have become extraordinarily removed, a life which in its own way is very down to earth, realistic and natural, and which we regard as primitive....

So our discussions went on, after that journey to the border of the territory of the Kunuguasaya. Sometimes in Ben's *finca* we talked far into the night. From Ben, we began to appreciate the point of view of the *colonos* among whom he lived: the need for more land as these smallholders were pushed off their own by the magnates; the move into apparently empty land; their natural desire for revenge after the Indians' sudden attacks; the armed posses riding into the hills. It was like the early expansion in North America and the Indian wars.

We argued too, endlessly, with Padre Atanasio and Alec Clark, pointing out the terrible things they were doing. They would tell us equally convincingly their own point of view. In a sense their work was utterly selfless. It was done for no gain on their part, and were they not giving the Indians the rudiments of Christian education? Who else would do it? Was it not better to do something than nothing, than to stand aside like ourselves and criticize? It was an anachronism to say missionaries were ignorant of the lives of the people they worked among. Many knew their languages and had studied their customs.

When we look back now, from a distance of many months and many thousands of miles, there are certain recollections which stand out more clearly: the first Indian we saw from the boat on the Río San Juan, suddenly appearing out of the dusk and balancing his canoe over our wake as if he were part of it; the Tukano dancing in the glow of burning beeswax, bodies glistening with sweat and head-dresses flashing in the darkness; a Kogi with his long hair blowing in the wind, the stone cairns beside the mountain lake and the glacier in the moonlight; the Motilon with the blood from his gaping wound forming a puddle about his feet, and the outburial cave with the mummified bodies and the lone nightjar.

Epilogue

172 Then there were the rock carvings in the Amazon, archaic yet extraordinarily alive. If art is an expression of a culture, these drawings could not have been the work of tropical foresters like the Tukano. From a hunting-fishing people you might expect to see fish or animals drawn naturalistically or in the abstract; yet we only once found this side of their existence expressed, and that was not in the Piraparaná. Many of the figures portrayed suns and moons, yet as far as we were aware neither had special significance in Tukano life. Moreover, Ni, standing as he did, isolated on a pinnacle of rock high above the river, made an almost emotional impact, as if the artist had wished to identify himself with the figure. It was drawn with an intensity of feeling completely foreign to the personality of the Amazonian. Yet José was able to tell us of a legend about it and the Indians had identified their own mystical spirit or water god with it.

Most of the figures were cut in sandstone and might have been sculptured by chipping with a harder rock, perhaps flint. But a fair number, including Ni, were cut as much as half an inch deep into granite rock which blunted our own knives. It is puzzling to know what implement could have been used, and staggering to consider the work involved.

Then there were the strange squared figures on the Apaporis, like the cardmen in Alice. We had noticed half-moon shapes like necklaces with pendants. These, like the squares, reminded us of Inca and Chibcha ornaments and loom-worked cotton cloaks, unshaped by the hand of a tailor.

In the Caquetá there seemed to be a third style of art, abstract, rather intellectual. Here the human form mattered little. Heads were squared, bodies were contorted into extraordinary shapes. There were large carvings covering ten square feet, a mass of intricate squares, frets, coils and spirals. It was as if the rocks had for ages been used as a vast sketchbook on which passing travellers had engraved their own conception of artistic design.

An Indian came to us during those endless days of waiting at the frontier post and told us of a cliff-face which was covered in drawings, many of
000 them coloured. He offered to take us there if we wished. But it was several days' journey through the forest and we dared not go, for while we were away the gunboat might have come and gone, and that would have meant waiting for months.

What is the significance of all these drawings? One immediately begins to think of past civilizations in the forest. They may be some form of writing or communication. Perhaps they are the work of migratory peoples, moving north – south or east – west, from Panama to the Pampas, from the Andes to the mouth of the Amazon. In time it may be possible to make a compre-

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ABOVE: *Maraca woman playing a musical bow.* BELOW LEFT: *A boy with bird arrows and a pet toucan.* BELOW RIGHT: *The Motilon discover the wheel.*

[see p. 182-A]

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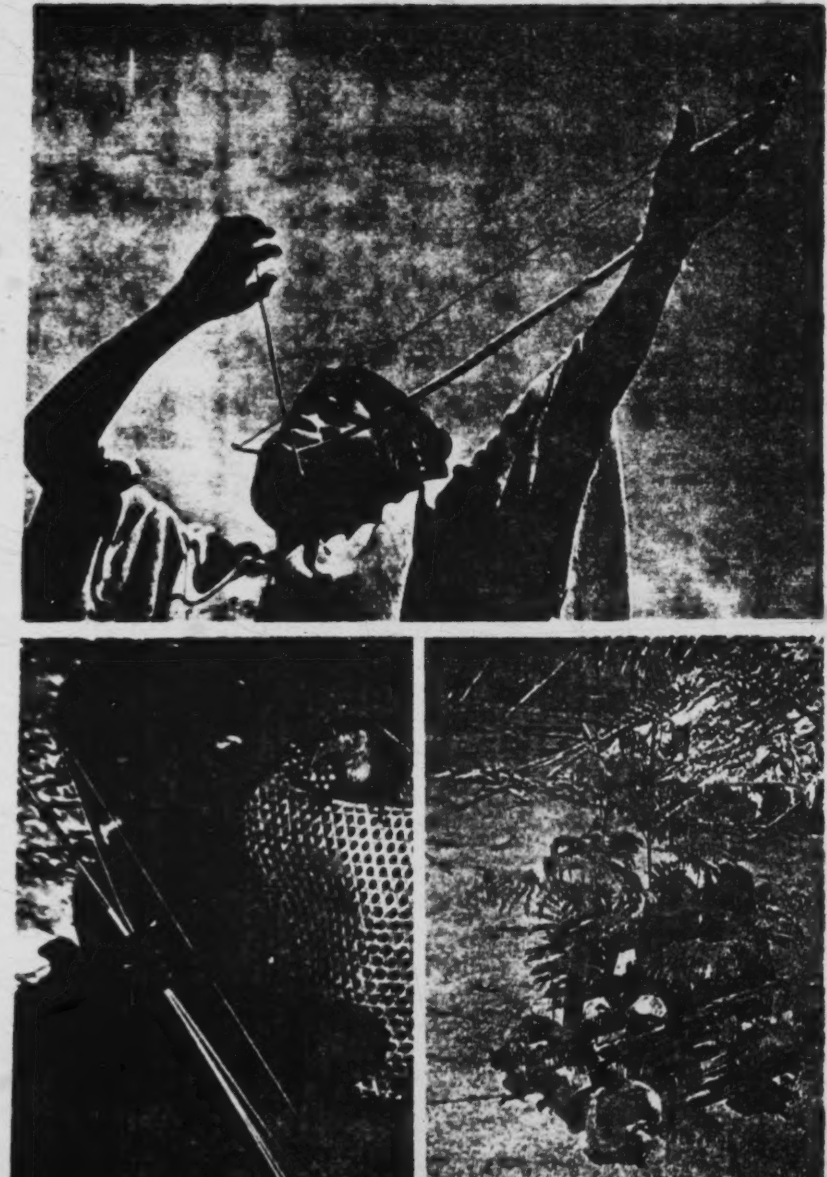

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ABOVE: Maraca women playing a musical bow. BELOW LEFT: A boy with bird arrows and a pet toucan. BELOW RIGHT: The Motilon discover the wheel.

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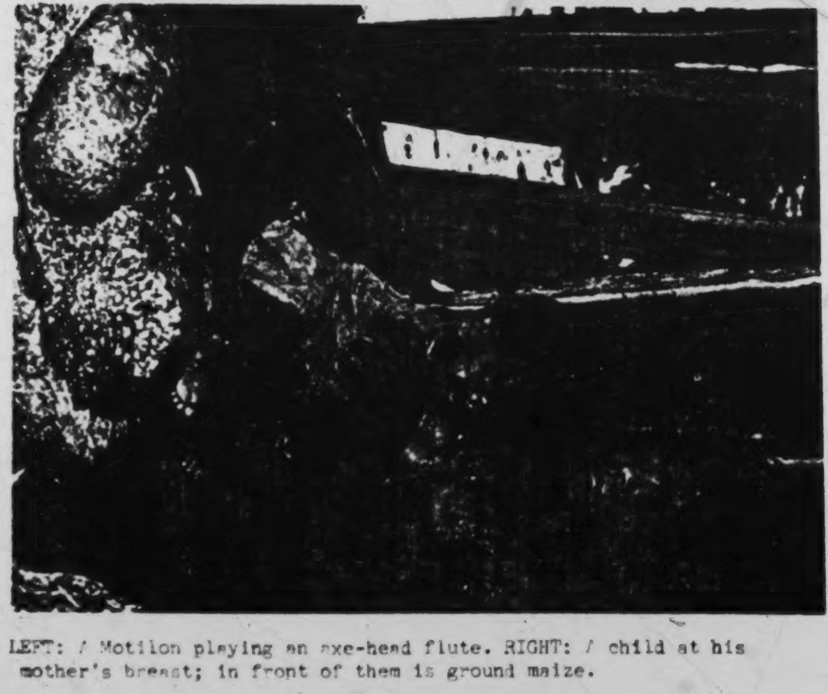

LEFT: A Motilon playing an axe-head flute. RIGHT: A child at his mother's breast; in front of them is ground maize.

hensive study of these designs all over South America. Certain trends might 000
be found, early migrations might be illustrated by particular styles. The study might also tell us something of the character of these people. It could show the course of their migrations and possibly even date them, though, unlike the cave art of Europe, it is impossible to date individual drawings. But if the diversity of the trends of art in the small area we visited is any indication, a survey of the whole would seem an almost superhuman task.

Among the highlanders artistic expression had less of the foresters' spontaneity. Their art had a particular purpose. The coloured stripes and markings on their cotton mantles showed the lineage or family of the wearer.
The Kogi, we were told, had gold ornaments, face-masks and even feather 532
head-dresses in their temples. But they were kept hidden as objects of religious ceremonial. The Motilon found expression in the bindings of their arrow-heads, but these, again, were probably once tribal marks used for identification.

The foresters seemed to decorate everything: the patterned basket-weaves of the Noanamá, their bead caps and gourd designs; the musical instruments, the clay or charcoal designs on the front of a Tukano *maloca*, and their gay festival paraphernalia. Here there was a more natural outflow of creativeness, which had become inhibited among the highlanders. There were a few signs of outside influence, yet it was essentially traditional art. The head-dress we brought back to the British Museum was compared with one obtained on the Caquetá by the botanist Richard Spruce over a hundred years ago. It is impossible to tell the difference. Here as in all Indian art is evidence of the supernatural, the power of an unfathomed spirit world. There is none of the triumph of mind over matter, none of the intellectualism we find in European art with the evolution of classicism and the baroque. In this sense even the work of the Maya or the Aztec was still primitive.

The forest dweller's art has the spontaneity of a child, yet his approach is both sophisticated and intelligent. He will weave a pattern for a basket because the idea appeals to him and shape a paddle with the finish of a craftsman and the design of an artist.

The Indian is something of a connoisseur. This is the result of a natural 123
critical sense. The Tukano would never accept cloth, fish-hooks or beads 437
from us without a thorough previous inspection. The colour of the cloth is of prime importance, its strength would be tested, as would be that of the fish-hooks and nylon line, and the test for a good bead was to place it between the teeth – to see if it cracked! Pottery or baskets we had obtained by barter

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LEFT: *A Motilon playing an axe-head flute.* RIGHT: *A child at his mother's breast; in front of them is ground maize.* [see p. 182-B]

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437 would be carefully inspected by Indians we met later, who would disregard them if they considered them inferior work.

533 171 Sometimes we would play music we had recorded in the Amazon to see what the highlanders' reaction was. Then we would play classical music or jazz. Usually a simple tune or one with a distinct rhythm conveyed something to them. There was some interest in Bach or Mozart, but none in Brahms. As for their own music, once we had shown our interest or they had heard the play-back on the recording machine, they all – with the exception of the Kogi – would play to us for hours, and the range of sounds and instruments was astonishing.

Astonishing, too, was the realization that an Indian besides being a cultivator, a hunter, a fisherman, a boat-maker and house-builder, besides knowing the tribal legends and myths and the arts of basket weaving, wood carving and design, was also a musician, not only playing but himself making, with considerable skill, a wide range of musical instruments.

534 Among the Tukano alone we counted fifteen such instruments. A jingle-rattle is admittedly not very difficult to play, but it requires skill to make one and to design it so that each shell produces a certain note. A panpipe or a deer-bone flute may not be difficult to make, but it takes practice and determination to play one.

534 778 562 171 The Indian is deeply involved in the natural world about him, and just as he incises on a calabash the representation of a beetle or a frog, he will try to imitate the calls of birds or the sounds of the forest. All his instruments reflect this forest environment: snail and tortoise shells, deer-bones, nutshells and gourds. But his music is also deeply involved with myth and ritual. We found the giant *jurupari* flutes were never placed where women could see them. They were used during the ceremony to call their god. When the women heard the flutes, booming like alpine horns in the distance, they fled into the forest, not daring to return till the flutes had been returned to the stream bed. The sacred significance of many of the instruments may account for their elaborate designs.

000 Very little is known of the origin of Indian, as of all music. Perhaps it first evolved during religious ceremonies, through the waving of a stick in the air or its being beaten on the floor; or perhaps through the rustle of marsh reeds held in the hand and shaken as Severiano did during the ceremony of Canta Haí. This may have been the first sound to suggest the use of nutshells and seed-rattles.

773 171 825 [777] When we were living with the Casacará-Motilon Alec Clark told us that the Indians put the mark of a stag's antlers on their foreheads to bring them luck. He also gave us his interpretations of the legend of the puma and the deer, from whom the clan was descended. In the Amazon the shaman is said to be able to disappear at will and travel through the forest in the guise of a puma, because this animal was the most dreaded of all. Both these animals

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occur constantly in the myth and legend of the tribes, as does the Motilon 773
legend of the twins. It is a legend known from Mexico to the tribes living in
Tierra del Fuego, which suggests a considerable antiquity. 825

Just as the puma is usually the symbol of fear, so the deer is credited by the Indian with fairy-like, almost feminine, qualities, perhaps because of its shyness and speed. It has been suggested that the deer is the symbol of new life, having been regarded as such by early migrations of hunting folk moving south along the chain of the Andes from North America. It was thus associated with first menstruation and all the accompanying rites when a girl reaches puberty and is able to create new life, and its hooves were used by women as ornaments or rattles. The deer-bone flute may have been the first musical instrument used by the Indians.

Several tribes have no musical instruments at all. Possibly these were the
first people to reach South America. Later migrations may have brought
instruments with them, possibly others evolved on the spot. The similarity 171
of some Kogi and Motilon instruments to those used in Central America 534
suggests a more recent influence.

At first we found it difficult to distinguish the sounds of the different in- 533
struments if we could not see them. But after a while we learnt to recognize 534
not only the instrument but also the many different tunes of each tribe. A 171
Noanamá girl would sing to herself for hours on end. The Motilon had a vast repertoire of walking, war and harvest songs. Instrumental tunes were fewer and some, as in the case of the haunting call of the snail shell, tended to be very repetitive. The Tukano, however, had innumerable panpipe tunes.

Indian music we at first found strange because we were accustomed to the European tone system. They have no conception of note vibrations to obtain an octave. Yet they can tell whether one instrument is in tune or not with another. A panpipe can be cut to a certain length to produce a particular sound, but it is difficult to produce the exact note, so they may raise the pitch by adding sand, or putting water or even *chicha* inside.

The panpipe tunes in the Tukano festival were the nearest thing we heard to orchestral music; each group played antiphonally, with sometimes two or three groups playing different tunes. We could not however make out whether combination or competition was the motive behind this weird performance.

The Tukano had no conception of counterpoint, though their playing was often harmonious. We did find it in the singing of the Noanamá – perhaps the result of mission teaching. One Tukano chant is almost identical to a western Irish folk lament.

In contrast to African negro music in which stringed instruments and drums predominate, Indian music is mainly that of the rattle and the flute. Every type of construction is found, from humming top and conch shell to

533 panpipes and the whistling jars of the Andes. Since the time of the Conquest 534 European music and more particularly African music has had an increasing 171 influence on the conservative Indian. The Noanamá and the highlanders showed signs of this influence, though the Tukano were still free of it. In some cases the instrument had been adopted and was played in the Indian idiom. The Noanamá had a type of drum probably copied from their negro neighbours, but they still played their own halting rhythms. The Motilon had a musical bow, but its use was entirely Indian in conception.

In the Sierra Nevada we found a direct clash of musical idioms, in the *chicote* and *gaita* played by the Indian-creole inhabitants. Perhaps in this are the seeds of a new music combining the atonal, remote and sad Indian music with the gay, sophisticated, ebullient harmonies of the negro-creole. Perhaps the folk music of Colombia as a whole, from the Spanish mountain songs to the negro rhythms of the coast, is a manifestation of a Euro-Afro-Indian music evolving like the arts and the people themselves into a new wholly South American dimension.

171 607 Such are the idle thoughts of travellers written in retrospect. But of all our memories – Kogi temples, Noanamá children paddling to their stilted houses in a Pacific sunset, a Tukano *maloca* at dawn with the steam rising off the night-wetted thatch – the one that will remain longest will be that of the Indian himself, whether a Kogi regarding us with the scorn of a man who knows himself to be a superior being, or a Tukano who never looks *at* you, rather into you with a strange trustful-untrusting eye, as if to try and penetrate your innermost thoughts.

000 Walk with him long enough in the forest and you too will learn to see the track of a tapir; to tell if it was running by the depth of the spoor; to tell if it was wounded by the clot of blood beside the path; even to tell the time when it passed, by the dryness of an upturned leaf, the only one on a shower-soaked forest floor. Perhaps if you could speak his language he would teach you how to walk through the forest for days a[illegible]ever lose your way, to use a bow and arrow, to kill a parrot with one dart from your blowpipe. You might even come to accept the forest for what it is. You would become part of it and it would be the only world you knew....

If you ever reached that stage, then you would be like an Indian. Then you would understand the shock of civilization. It would be like going for a very long holiday in a remote countryside, perhaps the Outer Hebrides, never seeing another soul, and then returning to the heart of a city. Only it would be a hundred times worse.

You would take cocaine because to you it would be perfectly natural. Your father took it and his father before him. You were told as a child that you could not live without it when in the late summer, at the end of the dry season, you had to travel great distances to find deer at the water holes.

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Without that small bag you would never reach your destination. The sun would travel many times across the sky before you could return.

It is fairly obvious now that in those few weeks in the Piraparaná when we became unduly agitated at the break-down of an engine or the disappearance of our guides, at the delays and frustrations, we had not begun to acquire the philosophical detachment of the Indian.

'When I feel like that,' Horacio would say, 'I just sling my hammock and let the world pass by,' and so saying would proceed to do precisely that. An Indian might have given us the same advice could he have understood the cause of our agitation or the complex mentality of the *civilizado*.

Perhaps if we could recall our childhood impressions before familiarity blunted our senses, before our minds or the pictures or images they formed were channelled along a specific course by what we were taught, before in fact we became specialists, we might understand the way an Indian looks at life – and perhaps even learn something from it.

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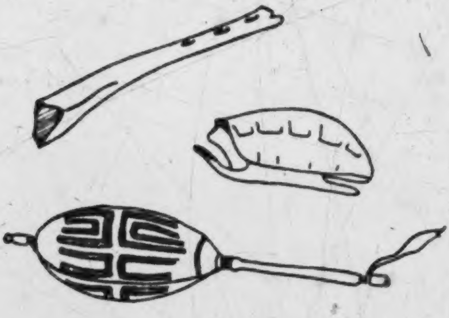

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